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2. Gregor Samarow is pseudonym of Johann Ferdinand Martin Oskar Meding.

3. Translator of this work is Fanny Wormald. This is per an advertisement for this book given on page xii. in "The Academy and literature, Volume 10," December 16, 1876.

FOR SCEPTRE AND CROWN.

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FOR SCEPTRE AND CROWN

A ROMANCE OF THE PRESENT TIME.

TRANSLATED FROM THE GERMAN OF

GREGOR SAMAROW.

IN TWO VOLUMES. VOL. II.

HENRY S. KING AND CO.

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FOR SCEPTRE AND CROWN.

CHAPTER XIII.

DELAY.

Events did indeed hurry on during those memorable days, and history took as many forward steps in the annals of the world in hours as she had formerly done in years. General von Manteuffel marched from the north; General Vogel von Falckenstein occupied Hanover, and took possession of the government of the country, the king having commanded all magistrates to keep in their various positions; General Beyer concentrated his divided forces in Hesse; General von Seckendorf occupied the country from Magdeburg to Nordhausen, and from Erfurt a part of the garrison and a battery of artillery marched to Eisenach, and there joined the troops of the Duke of Coburg-Gotha, to block the road to the south against the Hanoverian army.

Orders flew from Berlin to the different generals in command, and quick and unanimous movements were made throughout the Prussian army, their aim being to strengthen every point of a circle they were forming around the Hanoverian army, which continually grew stronger and drew closer together.

Now, only the quickest and most direct road to Fulda remained open.

And the brave-spirited army still lay in Göttingen and its immediate neighbourhood.

The general staff worked day and night to prepare it for the march. Certainly the younger officers and men boiled with impatience, and could not understand why the regiments, after making such a sudden march from their various quarters to Göttingen, were not able to march on by a perfectly open road to the south. Certainly old General Brandis shook his head, and said it would be better to break through the enemy with an army unprepared to march, than to be hemmed in with an army prepared to march. Certainly he hinted that the soldiers of the great Wellington had, according to every rule, frequently been unprepared to march, yet they had marched, fought, and conquered. Truly the king gnashed his teeth with impatience; he could do nothing, the ruler whose eyes were deprived of light by the hand of Heaven, but question and urge, and again urge and question.

But the general staff in the aula of Georgia Augusta proved to good General von Arentschildt that, according to all existing rules, the army was not yet ready to march. The rules lay before them, and the general staff was right; and General von Arentschildt told the king the army could not march yet.

The general staff waited, too, for the advance of the Hessians and Bavarians, to combine with the Hanoverian army.

The king was obliged to wait in silent impatience in his rooms at the Crown Hotel.

The troops, in their quarters and cantonments, waited, and their impatience was not silent; on the contrary, the air resounded with good hearty oaths, and impatience was loudest and liveliest amongst the cavalry regiments, where the snorting horses pawed the ground, and the men thought they had but to spring into the saddle to be as ready to march as any cavalry in the world.

They all waited.

Count Platen waited for some relenting on the part of Prince Ysenburg. He had sent an explanation about the Prussian ultimatum from Göttingen to the prince, and he hoped it might be the means of recommencing negotiations; but on the second day the explanation itself came back, opened, it is true, but with the short and cold remark from Prince Ysenburg that after the declaration of hostilities all his diplomatic functions had ceased, and that he was no longer in a position to receive writings from the Hanoverian minister.

So they all waited, and impatience waxed hotter in the army still unprepared to march; but so much had been neglected and left disorderly--so the new leaders of the army found and maintained--that, in spite of all this and all that, they still could not march.

The courier Duve went on his way without meeting a Prussian soldier; he found the Hessian head-quarters not in Fulda, but in Hanau, and there General von Lossberg declared he could not alter the disposition of the army, as Prince Alexander of Hesse had already assumed the command,--besides the army of Hesse-Cassel was immovable.

The courier hastened on; and in Frankfort he delivered to Baron Kübeck, the Austrian

presidential ambassador to the confederacy, the despatches confided to him by Count Ingelheim, and he received from Herr von Kübeck an urgent memorial to Prince Alexander of Hesse, who was then in Darmstadt. Duve told the prince all about the position of the Hanoverian army, which was entirely unknown to him. Prince Alexander sent a message, that he would request the Bavarians, who were at Schweinfurth, to march towards the north, and that the eighth corps d'armée at Fulda should march upon Eschwege immediately, to stretch out a hand to the Hanoverian army; and finally, that the Hessian brigade should be pushed forwards from Hanau to Giessen as a demonstration.

It was expected in Prince Alexander's head-quarters that the Hanoverian army would march immediately on the road to Fulda, there join the Hessian brigade, and unite with the eighth army corps. The road to Fulda was free, and only a portion of General Beyer's divided corps could have been met with, and it was improbable that it would have hazarded an encounter.

This was the way they reckoned in Prince Alexander's head-quarters.

But the new Hanoverian generals decided otherwise in the aula of Georgia Augusta. News had arrived partly from travellers, partly from messengers sent to ascertain, that 60,000, 80,000, yes 100,000 Prussian troops blocked the way to Fulda; so it was decided not to take that road, but to march into the midst of the Prussian territory between the Prussian armies, and to get to Eisenach by Heiligenstadt and Treffurt, there to cross the road and to fall in with the Bavarians, from whom they had received no information; but they remained persuaded that they must be there.

In vain old General von Brandis shook his head, and remarked in his curt fashion, that an army who wished to fight must learn to stand up to the enemy; that if Prussian troops were on the road to Fulda, it was one of Wellington's practical maxims for conducting war, "to go on;" that, at any rate, they had a better chance of overthrowing the enemy and reaching the south that way, than by jumping out of the frying-pan into the fire, as they seemed determined to do.

The general staff unanimously determined to march to Heiligenstadt, and the king consented.

At last the army was to move on the morning of the 21st of June, at four o'clock, and a general cry of joy throughout all the quarters and cantonments greeted the order to march.

In exemplary order, as on parade, the valiant brigades formed. The king left Göttingen about five o'clock, the senate of the university and the civic magistrates assembling to take leave of him.

It was a brilliant and dazzling procession which in the early morning light crossed into the Prussian territory.

A half squadron of the Cambridge dragoons formed the body-guard of their royal master.

Mounted on a large and beautiful white horse, which was guided by Major Schweppe of the Guard Cuirassiers, with an almost imperceptible leading rein, rode George V., with the proud knightly bearing which always gave him so imposing and regal an aspect when on horseback; by his side came the crown prince in his hussar uniform, on a small thorough-bred horse. They were surrounded by a numerous suite, both civil and military; old General von Brandis, notwithstanding his seventy-one years, had sent back his carriage, and Count Ingelheim rode beside the king in a grey dress and long stable boots. The brilliant cavalcade was followed by the king's travelling carriage, drawn by six horses, with outriders and piquers; and then a number of other carriages for the suite, led horses, the master of the stables, and servants.

Whenever the royal train passed the troops on the march, a loud, joyful hurrah burst forth, and every brave soldier's heart beat higher when he saw his king amongst them.

The courageous but strategically puzzling march of the Hanoverian army belongs to history, and is fully related in writings upon the war of 1866. It may perhaps be granted to future times to unriddle the extraordinary movements made by the army, and perhaps to explain why the march upon Treffurt was given up when they had reached Heiligenstadt, and their course turned by Mühlhausen to Langensalza; from thence right under the cannon of Erfurt they marched to Eisenach, and then suddenly, when this place was as good as taken, they halted, because an envoy from the Duke of Coburg-Gotha, without credentials, appeared at the Hanoverian headquarters. Major von Jacobi was sent by the Hanoverian general staff to Gotha to clear up this mission; and there, deceived as to the number of Prussian troops occupying Eisenach, he telegraphed such an account of the enemy to Colonel von Bülow, the Hanoverian officer in command, that, misled by the report, he withdrew his troops from Eisenach, and concluded a provisional armistice with the enemy.

When, therefore,--so runs the official report of these events,--General von Arentschildt arrived on the spot at about eight o'clock in the evening, expecting to find Eisenach taken, he was opposed to circumstances that completely defeated his plans, and contradicted all his majesty's views, but which both the armistice just concluded and the approaching night prevented him from grappling with.

Major von Jacobi was brought before a court-martial, the course of which was rendered

impossible by succeeding events.

The reception of the envoy, the negotiations commenced with him and with the Duke of Coburg in the midst of military action, combined with the withdrawal of the troops from Eisenach, caused the idea to gain ground in Berlin that the king wished to negotiate; and King William of Prussia, animated by the desire of avoiding a bloody encounter with the Hanoverians, sent General von Alvensleben to the Hanoverian head-quarters, situated on the 25th June at Gross-Behringen, on the road to Eisenach.

During the previous negotiations with the Duke of Coburg, and the withdrawal of the Hanoverian troops, the Prussians had seized the opportunity of reinforcing Eisenach so strongly that it was now very difficult to take it.

General von Alvensleben announced himself in Bavaria as empowered by his majesty the King of Prussia "to receive any commands from the King of Hanover." The negotiations turned upon the proposition made by the Hanoverian council of war, that the Hanoverian troops should be granted a free passage to the south without battle or bloodshed, upon condition of abstaining for a certain time from fighting against Prussia. Prussia required that the time named should be a year, and demanded various guarantees and pledges. The King of Hanover did not accept these stipulations, yet negotiations were not broken off; on the contrary, a suspension of hostilities was concluded, and the king promised a definite answer on the morning of the 26th of June. But when he despatched Colonel Rudorff, of the general staff, early in the morning of the 26th, he was turned back by General Vogel von Falckenstein, who had already arrived in Eisenach and concentrated there nearly two whole divisions. He declared he know nothing of an armistice, and that he should certainly attack the enemy.

The Hanoverian army was thus placed in a most unfavourable position. The king, who had passed the night in Behringen, removed his head-quarters early on the morning of the 26th to the Schützhaus[1] in Langensalza.

The Schützhaus, a large and handsome building, stands back from the road leading to Eisenach, at some little distance from the town; before it is a large open square, and opposite to it rises the spacious post-house. Behind the house there is a large garden surrounded by high walls and covered walks, and a broad verandah connects the house with the garden.

Double sentries were posted before the Schützhaus; in the square stood the royal carriages, and officers of every branch of the service came and went; the aides-de-camp of the general in command, whose head-quarters were in the town, hurried to and fro, to bring the king the latest information,--all was movement and military life.

The army was concentrated around Langensalza, and placed in a defensive position, for as General Vogel von Falckenstein refused to recognize the armistice, a Prussian attack was expected at any moment. After Falckenstein had learnt from General von Alvensleben all particulars, he declared himself willing to respect the suspension of arms; but the defensive position of the Hanoverian army was nevertheless maintained.

The king sat in his room. The expression on his face was very grave. Old General von Brandis stood near him.

"My dear Brandis," said the king gloomily, "I fear we are in very evil case!"

"Alas! I am quite sure we are, your majesty!" replied the general.

"I fear," continued the king, "that these unfortunate and involved negotiations have only served to give the Prussians time to strengthen the forces opposed to us, and to make our position worse. Without these negotiations we should have taken Eisenach and perhaps we should by this time have joined the Bavarians in safety."

"We should certainly have done so," said the general drily. "Your majesty will do me the justice to remember I always spoke strongly against these negotiations," he continued. "According to my opinion your majesty might negotiate or march; but to attempt both together would never succeed. I cannot understand what these negotiations were to lead to. I do not see their aim. To march to the south under the obligation not to fight against Prussia for a certain time----"

"For two months," interrupted the king.

"But what good could it do?" pursued the general; "what reception could we expect in South Germany if we arrived saying, 'Here we are, we want maintenance and quarters, but we can't fight'? I really don't know," said he with some bitterness, "what I should say to such a surprise were I the general commanding the South German troops. I believe that it would have been better to have stayed in Hanover."

A slight look of impatience passed over the king's face, but it vanished immediately, and he said, kindly but gravely,--

"But, my dear Brandis, the commanding general and the general staff assured me the army was unprepared to undertake any serious military operation, and that after we reached South

Germany eight weeks at least would be required before it was in a condition to fight! It was for this reason that I entered upon negotiations,--how could I do otherwise?"

"I do not venture," said the general, "to question your majesty's decision or mode of action, but I must again repeat I do not understand the theories which govern the general staff. The results of all their labour are only negative, and their movements continual retreats. Yet, your majesty," he cried, "we want to go forwards! and to go forwards we must march. To march straight on invigorates an army, to halt long in one place wearies it, but aimless marching hither and thither will in the end demoralize it."

The king was silent and sighed deeply.

"Your majesty," said the general with warmth and energy, "there is but one way now which can save us, and that is a hasty march upon Gotha. The Prussians expect from our previous operations that we shall work across the railway near Eisenach, and they have drawn together their greatest strength in that direction. Let your majesty at once direct your course by forced marches upon Gotha, we shall find but little resistance, and we shall break through it. We have nineteen thousand men; even if we lose four thousand, we shall still reach--and of this I am certain--South Germany with fifteen thousand men; we shall bring immediate assistance, and above all things we shall maintain the honour of your majesty's banner in the field. If we stay here," he added sorrowfully, "we must end badly."

"But the negotiations with Alvensleben," said the king hesitating,--"Count Platen still hopes for a favourable result."

"What result?" exclaimed General von Brandis; "the results of the negotiations on either side have not been brilliant."

"Count Platen!" announced the groom of the chambers.

The king made a sign, and Count Platen entered.

"Your majesty," he cried, "the Prussian Colonel von Döring has arrived as an envoy from Berlin, and brings a despatch from Count Bismarck; it appears that in Berlin they still wish to negotiate."

"Let the colonel come immediately," said the king.

General Brandis shrugged his shoulders and walked to the window.

Count Platen returned with the Prussian staff-officer.

"Colonel von Döring!" said the count, introducing him, whilst he approached the king with a stiff military salute; "he begs permission to read your majesty a despatch from the minister-president, Count Bismarck."

"I am prepared to listen, colonel," replied the king.

The colonel opened a paper which he held in his hand.

"I must first remark to your majesty," he said, "that I consider myself freed from my charge, as I find negotiations are broken off, and General Vogel von Falckenstein already meditating an attack."

"Your communication then will be useless?" asked the king coldly.

"Nevertheless, if your majesty permits, I will carry out my orders."

"Even yet----" began Count Platen.

"Read, colonel," said the king.

The colonel slowly read the despatch. It was an exact repetition of the ultimatum received through Prince Ysenburg on the 15th, and proposed a treaty on the foundation of the Prussian project of reform.

"Does this man believe," cried the king, as the colonel ended, "that I shall now----"

"Your majesty," said Colonel von Döring in a firm voice, "I humbly beg you graciously to consider that I, as a Prussian officer, cannot hear any derogatory expression applied to the minister-president."

"Is he not a man like ourselves?" asked the king, with dignity. "Does Count Bismarck believe," he continued, "that I shall in the field, at the head of my army, accept conditions which I rejected in my cabinet at Herrenhausen, and that I shall now allow my army to march against Austria?"

"Could not a short time be granted for consideration?" suggested Count Platen.

"I have no orders for granting time," said Colonel von Döring.

"And I do not need it," said the king, "in giving you my answer. It is the same as before; it is to these propositions simply 'No.' I have listened to negotiations in the hope of preventing useless bloodshed and diminishing the burdens of our countrymen, but upon this basis I cannot negotiate; events must take their course, I can do nothing more to restrain them. I thank you, colonel, and I wish I had made your acquaintance on a happier occasion. Take care, gentlemen," he added, turning to Count Platen and General Brandis, "that the colonel is led in safety to our outposts."

Colonel von Döring made a military salute and left the king's room, accompanied by the two ministers.

Count Ingelheim walked thoughtfully to and fro before the house, and looked up from time to time with an anxious expression at the king's windows. Groups of officers stood around in animated conversation. They knew that a Prussian envoy was with the king, and all these brave young officers, thirsting for the battle, feared nothing more than that they should capitulate without fighting.

"We could never again be seen in a Hanoverian uniform," cried a young officer of one of the Guard regiments with a rosy childish face, as he stamped with his foot, "if we were ensnared without drawing the sword, as in a mousetrap. We have been marching a fortnight, now here, now there; now waiting for the Bavarians, then for the Hessians, and never going forwards. So much was expected from this new commander; and now ..."

An eager young officer on a swift horse galloped up in the Guard Jäger uniform, the star of a commander of the order of Ernest Augustus on his breast. He threw himself from the saddle, gave his horse to his servant, who had hastened after him, and walked up to the group of officers.

"Well, prince," cried the lieutenant in the Guards, "where do you come from so hastily?"

"I have ridden out a little amongst the troops," replied Prince Hermann von Solms-Braunfels, the king's youngest nephew, as he endeavoured to seize the down just shading his upper lip with his fingers. "I am in despair, for in spite of my earnest request the king has commanded me to be here at head-quarters, but from time to time I must escape into the free life of the camp, and enjoy a little fresh air. Where are you stationed, Herr von Landesberg?" he inquired of the young lieutenant.

"Here in Langensalza," he replied, "fretting over the inactivity imposed upon us by the general staff. The king should just listen to us, the young officers of the army; he would soon be convinced that the army was ready both to march and to fight."

"God knows it is so," exclaimed an hussar officer, drawing his long moustache through his fingers; "I cannot comprehend why we have a general staff only to arrange such marches as we have made. I have heard an old story of the Crusaders, or some such people," continued the hussar drily, "who let a goose go before them, and followed the line of march pursued by the fowl. That was both a simpler and a kinder course, for now they strip the poor bird of its feathers and write with them night and day--and nothing more clever comes of it."

"See, there comes the Prussian envoy back!" cried Herr von Landesberg, and the officers approached the Schützhaus, at the door of which Colonel Döring, accompanied by General von Brandis and Count Platen, appeared.

Whilst General von Brandis called the carriage and ordered a guard of four dragoons to accompany it, Count Platen politely took leave of the Prussian colonel and hastened to Count Ingelheim, who met him full of anxiety.

"It was the ultimatum of the 15th over again," cried the minister to the Austrian ambassador.

"And...?" asked Count Ingelheim.

"Of course it was at once declined," exclaimed Count Platen.

"Then these luckless negotiations are over at last?" asked Count Ingelheim, watching with secret relief Colonel von Döring's carriage as it rolled away.

"Quite at an end," said Count Platen, as he sighed slightly.

"Do you know, dear count," proceeded the ambassador, "that in my opinion your position here is a very serious one? You are in a corner between the Prussian armies, and I see only *one* way out; that is by a hasty march upon Gotha."

"Yes, the king is quite ready to go forward, but the general staff----"

"Would to heaven!" cried Count Ingelheim energetically, "that his majesty had retained his old officers; I do not believe that Tschirschnitz would have allowed these constantly retrograde marches."

"Yes," said Count Platen, with a slight shrug, "it is so difficult for me to do anything in military

affairs. In Göttingen the wish seemed universal."

"The wish is universal to act and to march; do you see that knot of officers? I am sure they are of my opinion;" and he pointed out a group in which Lieutenant von Landesberg was just expressing his joy at the envoy's departure, and his hopes of speedy action.

Prince Hermann left the officers and joined Platen and Ingelheim.

"The envoy is not coming back again?" he asked.

"No, prince," cried Count Ingelheim, "I hope he is the last."

Four post-horses dashed quickly along the road, drawing a close carriage with a servant in travelling livery upon the box.

"Who is this?" cried Count Platen, with surprise, and all eyes turned upon the carriage as it drew up before the house. The servant sprang down and opened the door.

An old gentleman in travelling dress, wrapped in a large Havelock cloak, his white head covered with a black cap, got out slowly and looked around as if seeking for something.

"Persiany!" exclaimed Prince Hermann.

"Good heavens, Persiany!" cried Count Platen, with amazement; then, with a pleased look and hasty footstep he met and welcomed the Emperor of Russia's ambassador at the Hanoverian court.

"What does he want here?" asked Count Ingelheim; and a dark cloud passed over his face.

"It looks well for us, as far as the inclinations of Russia go," said the prince; "and," he continued, with a smile, "he is at least no Prussian envoy."

"Who knows?" murmured Count Ingelheim. And an investigating look followed Count Platen's meeting with Persiany.

"At last I have found you, my dear count," cried the Russian ambassador, an old gentleman with strongly marked features and dark piercing eyes, which now wore an expression of the greatest anxiety. "Thank God that this horrible journey is at an end." And he held out a hand trembling with weakness to the minister.

"You will never believe what I have gone through," he continued, as he took off his cloak, "in that dreadful carriage, always delayed by the movements of the troops, without sleep, without proper nourishment, at my age."

"Well," said Count Platen, "you can now rest at least; we cannot offer you much, our head-quarters are not rich in comforts----"

"But first," interrupted Monsieur de Persiany, "where is his majesty? I beg an immediate audience; I come by the command of my gracious master and emperor."

Count Platen looked surprised, and listened attentively; then he exclaimed,--

"Come with me, I will at once announce your arrival to his majesty."

He gave his arm to the old gentleman, who trembled from exhaustion, and assisted him in mounting the stairs leading to the upper rooms of the Schützhaus.

In the ante-room Monsieur de Persiany sank into a chair. Count Platen entered the king's apartment and found him resting on a sofa. Lex sat near him, reading aloud.

"Forgive me for disturbing you, your majesty," said the minister, "but Monsieur de Persiany is here at the command of the Emperor Alexander, and he requests an immediate audience."

George V. rose, an expression of joy shining in his face.

"How?" he cried, with animation,--"and what does he bring? let him come in!"

Count Platen led the Russian ambassador into the room.

"Welcome to the camp, my dear Monsieur de Persiany!" cried the king, holding out his hand to him as he entered.

The old gentleman seized it, and said, in trembling voice,--

"Good God, your majesty! what times are these? how painful it is to me to see you under such circumstances!"

His hand shook and tears glittered in his eyes.

"Monsieur de Persiany is much exhausted by his journey, your majesty," said Count Platen.

The king seated himself on the sofa, and exclaimed,--

"Pray sit down, Monsieur de Persiany, you are in want of refreshment. Lex, go and find a glass of wine."

"I thank you, I thank your majesty most humbly," said the old gentleman, as he sank into a chair as if quite exhausted. "I shall find something by and by. Now let me impart to your majesty all that the emperor, my gracious master, has commanded me to say. I was to seek your head-quarters, and to assure you of his friendly sympathy."

"The emperor is very good," said the king; "I recognize in this the friendship he has always shown me, and to which my whole heart responds."

"The emperor commanded me," continued Persiany, with labouring breath, "to place myself at your majesty's disposal, as he understood negotiations were being carried on with Prussia, and thought the intervention of a neutral power, friendly alike to both sovereigns----"

The king's brow clouded.

"Negotiations have been broken off," he said.

"Good heavens!" cried Persiany, "I have come too late!" And he sank back in his chair as if broken down by the thought that his fatiguing journey had been in vain.

"Is it then quite impossible to prevent bloodshed?" he asked, folding his trembling hands; "the emperor firmly believes that the king of Prussia is desirous of coming to an understanding, and if your majesty----"

"My dear Monsieur de Persiany," said the king, "I do not know how I could again commence negotiations. The Prussians, just before your arrival, offered me the ultimatum which I could not accept on the 15th, and I have again refused it."

"My God! my God!" cried Persiany, "what a misfortune it is at such a moment to be so old and feeble, no longer master of my nerves. Possibly through my mediation you might again----" He could add no more, his voice failed him, he was almost fainting.

"My dear ambassador," said the king, in a gentle voice, "I thank you heartily for the rapid and fatiguing journey you have undertaken in order to prove to me the friendship and amiable wishes of the emperor; but at present nothing can be done. You stand greatly in need of rest and refreshment, I beg you to withdraw. Count Platen will take care of you."

"I thank you, I thank your majesty," said Persiany, rising with difficulty; "I stand in need of a little nourishment. I shall soon be *à mon aise*; under all circumstances I am at your majesty's disposal."

His strength threatened to fail him, he took Count Platen's arm, and was led by him into a room in which a bed was prepared, upon which the exhausted old man immediately fell into a slumber, whilst his servant repaired to the meagrely supplied kitchen in search of some refreshment with which to restore his master's strength when he awoke.

Count Platen sought the Austrian ambassador as he paced up and down the garden.

"Well, some new negotiation, is it not so?" asked Count Ingelheim, casting a penetrating glance at the minister.

"It appears," he replied, "that in St. Petersburg, either from their own inclination or the wish of Prussia, they desire to mediate--perhaps Colonel von Döring's mission was connected--but at all events----"

"My dear count," interrupted the Austrian ambassador gravely; "I refrained from any remark whilst negotiations continued; they were, in form at least, of a military nature; you see the military position into which these negotiations have led you; you are shut in between the Prussian armies, crushed--if you do not quickly seize the only way in which lies safety. Will you give the enemy time to close the only road now open, that leading to Gotha, by again commencing negotiations? Besides, this time," he added, "the affair is political, and I must seriously call your attention to its political results. The former negotiations have placed your military position in great danger; shall your political position be also imperilled? What will be said in Vienna, if even at this moment no reliance can be placed on Hanover; and if through the mediation of Russia, negotiations are again begun with Prussia?"

"But not the smallest negotiation is begun," said Count Platen.

"Because good old Persiany is asleep," said Count Ingelheim; "because he has no nerve. But when he wakes, I beg you, Count Platen, send this Russian mediator away; do you still hope to find any support except in Austria? or do you wish to be excluded from her sympathy, and from the benefits to be gained by the great struggle about to take place?"

"But I ask you, on what excuse?" said Count Platen hesitatingly.

"On what excuse?" cried Count Ingelheim; "the sickly old man will accept any excuse with thankfulness that sends him out of this noise, these hardships, and the near neighbourhood of cannon. Consider," he continued urgently, "what will be said in Vienna, by the emperor, who builds so strongly upon Hanover, by all your friends in society, who count so much upon you, the Schwarzenbergs, the Dietrichsteins, Countess Mensdorff, Countess Clam-Gallas----"

"Persiany shall go!" exclaimed Count Platen; "they know in Vienna my devotion to Austria; in the exposed position of Hanover----"

"It is best to hold firmly to one side or the other," said Count Ingelheim, "and to gain a sure friend, even at the twelfth hour."

"I will go to the king," said Count Platen, and he walked slowly towards the house.

Count Ingelheim looked after him, and shook his head slightly.

"If he only meets no one on the way," he said to himself. "I fear," he added, continuing his soliloquy, "I fear matters here will not end well; there is no connecting link between the heroic king and his brave army; this general staff is ignorant of war, it knows but one maxim, to get out of the enemy's way whenever he shows himself; and the crown prince----"

He sighed deeply.

"However," he added, "we have always gained something. The Hanoverian campaign has cost Prussia much time; has absorbed many troops; all this is clear gain on our side; the occupation of the country absorbs much of its strength; above all things an understanding, a political arrangement, must be prevented which would leave the enemy's hands free here in the north. But here comes my northern colleague!" And he hastened to meet the Russian ambassador as he came out of the house.

Monsieur de Persiany had slept a little, had refreshed his toilette a little, and had eaten a little, and he looked much fresher than before. But his footsteps were still uncertain as he walked to meet Count Ingelheim.

"Welcome to head-quarters, my dear colleague," cried the latter, as he held out his hand; "the corps diplomatique is well represented--I was its only member up to this time! You are fatigued by the journey, are you not?"

"Tired to death!" cried Persiany, as he sank upon a garden seat, where Count Ingelheim placed himself at his side; "tired to death, and it does not appear that they have much to revive one here."

"No, that there certainly is not," said Count Ingelheim; "the whole day noise, trumpet calls, bugle sounds----"

"Horrible!" exclaimed Persiany.

"And at night no bed, or at best a hard straw mattress."

Persiany folded his hands and raised his eyes to heaven.

"These are only slight disagreeables which we scarcely think of," said Count Ingelheim.

Persiany looked at him with an expression of great surprise.

"It will be much more unpleasant when action really begins, when real fighting commences," said the Austrian diplomatist; "the king is certain to be in the midst, and we must of course be with him."

"Do you think we should really be in danger?" asked Persiany, "our diplomatic character----"

"Will scarcely preserve me from imprisonment," said Count Ingelheim; "for we are at war with Prussia. With you it is somewhat different: you are certain to be treated with consideration, so soon as you have identified yourself before a commander of troops. But in the mêlée!..." And he shrugged his shoulders.

"Should we really have cause to fear?" asked Persiany.

"My dear colleague," replied Count Ingelheim, sighing slightly, and casting a penetrating look at the Russian diplomatist, "a cannon ball, the pistol of an hussar, the sword of a cuirassier, little heed the diplomatic character."

"My God!" cried Persiany. "But if fighting begins I scarcely think I ought to remain here; we are at peace with Prussia."

"It will come suddenly, I think, and without much warning; there will be no choice," said Count

Ingelheim drily. "I do not believe our lives will be actually in danger; but really it will be sufficiently unpleasant to hear the noise of battle--to see the blood--the corpses----"

Persiany fell back on the bench, and his white lips trembled as he thought of such a trial to his nerves.

"I wonder if they have some soda-water here?" he asked.

"I do not think so," said Count Ingelheim; "we do not find such things, and the small store they have is carefully put aside for the wounded in the approaching engagement. At the king's table we have thin beer, cold beef, and baked potatoes."

"Impossible!" cried Persiany.

Count Ingelheim shrugged his shoulders.

"What would you have?" said he; "you cannot expect good dinners in the midst of war; besides, we sportsmen are accustomed----"

"But I am not a sportsman!" cried Persiany.

"Here comes Count Platen," exclaimed the Austrian ambassador; "perhaps he will bring us some news."

Count Platen came and begged the Russian ambassador, who was greatly shaken by Count Ingelheim's descriptions, to accompany him to the king.

"You do not believe further negotiations are possible?" asked Persiany, as he ascended the steps.

"I do not think the king will permit anything to be attempted," replied Count Platen, after a short hesitation.

"Then----" said M. de Persiany--but he could not express his thoughts, for they had reached the door of the king's room.

"My dear Monsieur de Persiany," said George V., "I sent for you in order----I hope, though, you are somewhat rested."

"I thank your majesty," said Persiany, sighing; "I am a little stronger."

"I sent for you," said the king, "to thank you for the zeal which caused you to undertake a journey, doubly fatiguing to one of your years, and in your weak health, for the purpose of expressing to me the emperor's friendly regard, and his hearty desire to mediate. I would also beg you to remain longer at my head-quarters----"

A slight flush passed over Persiany's face; he gasped.

"If," continued the king, "there were the least possibility of negotiating, after Colonel von Döring had been the bearer of a proposal again based on the Prussian project of reform, which I had already declined. Also the envoy considered his commission actually annulled before he delivered it. I should therefore only torment you, and injure your health uselessly, by exposing you to the tumult and fatigues of war, if I kept you with me. I beg you therefore to return to Hanover. Your advice will be useful to the queen. Pray thank the emperor most heartily and sincerely for his sympathy and friendship."

"If your majesty is really of opinion that all hope of negotiation is over, that I should be useless to you, and that I might perhaps be of service to her majesty the queen in Hanover----"

"That is quite my opinion," said the king.

"If it were possible," said Persiany, "that perhaps the course of events,--opposed to a superior power,--still the moment for negotiation might come,--it would be my duty to remain,--and only your majesty's distinct command----"

"If it must be so," said the king, "I give this command; set out immediately, and tell the queen how you found me and the army."

"Then I must obey," cried Persiany. "I pray God to bless your majesty, and to guide things to a happy termination."

With great emotion the old gentleman seized the hand the king offered him, and a tear fell upon it.

The king smiled good-humouredly.

"I know what a true affection you bear towards me and my family. God protect you--and your emperor!" he added heartily.

Persiany returned with Count Platen to the garden, where Count Ingelheim awaited them.

"Well, my dear colleague," he cried, "you look much more cheerful. Are you growing reconciled to camp life?"

"The king has dismissed me," said Persiany; "he sends me back to Hanover; my old carcass will no longer undergo such trials. But," he added, turning to Count Platen, "by the way that I came, by the same will I not return; send me to Gotha. I will get to Frankfort, from there perhaps to Umwegen, but yet it will be the quickest and safest road. I must set out at once. I may be of use in Hanover."

The old gentlemen pressed Count Ingelheim's hand, and tripped hastily to the house, leaning on Count Platen's arm. His carriage and a guard were soon ready.

"The storm has blown over," said Count Ingelheim, rubbing his hands, and laughing as he looked after the Russian ambassador; "yes, if they wish to succeed in diplomacy in these times, they must send people with strong muscles and firm nerves."

And he walked with youthful elasticity towards the house.

An hour later the king hold a council of war. He assembled the general in command, the general staff, the adjutant-general, and General von Brandis. He also requested Count Platen, Count Ingelheim, and Herr Meding to be present.

The king urged an immediate advance upon Gotha. General von Brandis, Colonel Dammers, and all the non-military gentlemen strongly supported the king's opinion.

Colonel Cordemann, the chief of the general staff, insisted strongly that the army, in consequence of its exhausting marches and scanty food, could not possibly undertake offensive movements, and that their course was to take up a defensive position, and make a courageous defence if attacked. The whole of the general staff agreed with the chief, and the general in command stated that under existing circumstances he could not be responsible for the consequences of an onward march.

The king gave his consent to the dispositions agreed upon with a sigh, but he declared that he would pass the night amongst his troops, and about midnight, accompanied by the whole of his suite, their royal master established himself amongst his soldiers for the night.

The royal bivouac was in a corn-field near to Merxleben, and everyone listened with anxious expectation until the morning dawned.

All was quiet. The outposts sent in no news of any movement on the part of the enemy.

About four o'clock in the morning one of the emissaries sent out several days before towards the south, returned with the intelligence that the Bavarians had been seen advancing in several detachments, and that even on the 25th they had reached Bacha. The complete inactivity of the enemy seemed to support this information, and it was believed the Prussian forces were drawn away in that direction.

This idea gave great satisfaction in head-quarters, and it was determined to wait in a strong position for the confirmation of the intelligence and the approach of the Bavarians. General von Brandis alone shook his head, and opined that if the Bavarians were advancing and the Prussians occupied in the south, it was a stronger reason for hastening as quickly as possible to meet them, and stretching towards them a helping hand, before the overwhelming Prussian forces could come down upon them from the north.

The order was given to erect batteries, and the king and his suite, exhausted by a sleepless night, repaired to Thamsbrück, a small village on the banks of the Unstrut, and there the king took up his quarters in the Pfarrhaus.

Clear and brilliant rose the sun on the 27th of June, and his first rays lighted up the varied changing picture of the Hanoverian army encamped around Langensalza.

CHAPTER XIV.

LANGENSALZA.

At about five in the morning the king withdrew to the quiet Pfarrhaus on the hill at Thamsbrück, and retired to rest. From the dispositions made by the general staff a delay of

several days was expected, with probably some defensive fighting, whilst tidings were awaited of a more certain nature from the Bavarians.

Beneath a large and ancient linden-tree in front of the pastor's house the king's suite were assembled, discussing an extremely simple but much-relished breakfast.

A large table covered with a white cloth bore a coffee service of blue and white pottery, such as is traditional in all primitive old country-houses in North Germany, and the perfume which arose from the large pot standing on an ancient-looking chafing-dish was certainly not from Mocha.

A ham, a few sausages, a large black loaf, and a small piece of butter completed the provisions, over which Count Erhardt Wedel presided with the strictest impartiality.

The whole party did honour to the breakfast, with appetites rarely seen at the chamberlain's table at Herrenhausen.

"There seems to be an immense proportion of water in this beverage," said General von Brandis, gazing with curiosity at the brown fluid in his blue cup.

"If the coffee has too much water, it makes up for the dryness of the sausage," remarked Count Ingelheim, as he attempted to cut a slice with his pocket-knife, but the stony nature of the sausage successfully resisted all his efforts.

"At least the drink is warm," said Count Platen, as pale and shivering he sipped the smoking coffee.

"I don't know that warm water is much better than cold," grumbled General Brandis, without making up his mind to put his cup to his lips. "It has its merits as an outward application, but to drink it without a prudent admixture of some stimulating body is unpleasant, especially so early in the morning."

"Your excellency shares the prejudices of the ancient legions against water," said Count Wedel, laughing. "They used to say, as water was so unpleasant when it got into their boots, how much more disagreeable it would be if it got into their stomachs!"

"Wellington's veterans lived before the discovery of hydropathy," said little Herr Lex, as he busied himself in overcoming a large piece of ham.

"They were right!" cried General Brandis, with comic gravity. "Fire was their element," he added, setting his cup down untasted upon the table; "they did not carry on war with sugared water, as seems the present fashion."

"Perhaps I can offer your excellency a better drink for this chilly morning," said Prince Hermann Solms, drawing out a field flask covered with plaited straw. "I have a little excellent cognac left."

"You are a help in need, my dear prince," cried the old gentleman, smiling. "I will repay you some day!"

The prince, hastening into the house, came back with a kettle full of hot water, and he soon mixed the old general a glass of grog, with such a homoeopathic allowance of water that his cheerfulness quite returned.

A loud hurrah resounded from the stable-like buildings at one side of the house, and the Crown Prince Ernest Augustus hurried from them and joined the breakfast party.

He carried his handkerchief carefully tied together in one hand, and his cap in the other.

"Guess what I have here, gentlemen!" he cried, raising both hands above his head. "Fresh eggs--just laid. Is it not a glorious find?" And he emptied the cap and the handkerchief upon the table. "Now, shall we boil them, or shall we make an omelette?"

"Why any preparation?" said General Brandis, seizing an egg, decapitating it with his sword, and hastily drinking the contents. "It is easy to see that the present generation are unaccustomed to the rigours of war."

Count Ingelheim followed his example.

"It would be great fun, though, to make an omelette!" cried the crown prince, holding his hands over the rest of his spoil.

"Alas! we have plenty of time," murmured General Brandis.

"Listen!" cried Meding, springing to his feet.

"A cannon shot," said Count Ingelheim, putting his hand to his car.

"Impossible!" remarked the adjutant-general; "where should it come from? The general staff does not expect an attack."

A short, heavy, distant sound was heard.

"Those are certainly guns!" cried Count Wedel.

"I think they are beginning to growl," said General Brandis, rising and drinking off the rest of his grog with a look of satisfaction. "It would be as well to mount!"

"Shall his majesty be awakened?" asked Count Wedel.

"It will be time enough to call him if anything serious really appears," said Colonel Dammers. "I will go up to the top of the house, from whence one can overlook the whole plain."

He entered the house; Prince Hermann followed him, and the others listened anxiously to the sound of firing, which grew louder and more distinct every moment.

"After all, an omelette would be too much trouble," said the crown prince, putting his eggs into the kettle, the contents of which had not been much diminished by the general's grog. He placed it on the chafing-dish and blew the charcoal, listening attentively for the water to boil.

After a short time Colonel Dammers returned.

"Some strong columns are visible on the distant horizon; I can see their arms glittering through the dust!" he cried. "His majesty must be called."

Count Wedel hurried into the house.

Signals were heard from the plain. A general march was beginning in various parts of the camp.

George V. came out of the Pfarrhaus. They all approached the king.

"Your majesty," cried General Brandis, "I hear with joy the well-known voice of cannon; it makes my old heart young again."

The king's face expressed high courage and calm determination. He held out his hand to the general.

"I hear this voice in earnest for the first time," he said; "but, my dear general, my heart, too, beats higher at the sound. Now negotiations are impossible. God be with us!"

He folded his hands and raised his head silently to heaven. All those around him involuntarily followed his example.

The sound of horse's hoofs was heard. An officer of the garde du corps, springing from the saddle, informed the king, from the general in command, that the enemy were drawing up in strong columns upon the road from Gotha, and that the general begged his majesty to leave Thamsbrück immediately, and to go to the hills behind Merxleben.

Count Wedel hurried away; the horses were saddled and the carriages prepared.

"General von Arentschildt further begs your majesty's commands and instructions as to the capitulation which may be needful during the action," said the aide-de-camp.

General Brandis bit his moustache. Count Ingelheim stamped upon the ground.

"What does he mean?" asked the king quietly.

"The general staff," continued the officer, "has represented to the general that the troops are so worn out and badly fed that they may be unable to endure the fatigue of battle; he therefore begs permission to capitulate should he deem it needful. He has drawn up an instruction on this point, and he begs your majesty to send it back to him signed." He handed the king a paper.

The king had closed his teeth firmly, and he drew his breath with a sharp, almost hissing sound.

Without the slightest movement of haste or anger he took the paper and tore it through.

"Ride back to General Arentschildt," he said in a calm ringing voice, "and tell him my commands, to resist to the last man!"

The officer's face brightened. With a military salute he turned sharply round, sprang into the saddle, and galloped off.

"And now forwards! gentlemen," cried the king.

"Father, have a new-laid egg!" And the crown prince, hurrying up, offered the king a plate, on

which was a specimen of his cooking.

"Eat it, your majesty," said General Brandis; "there is no saying when or where you may get anything else." And he handed the king an egg, after breaking the shell with the hilt of his sword.

The king ate it and turned to the horses.

They mounted and set out; dragoons preceded them and acted as a guard; the carriages and the led horses followed.

As the king rode out of the village of Thamsbrück, the artillery duel had already fully commenced.

From the hill above they saw the lines of the enemy's skirmishers before the town of Langensalza. The enemy's batteries were on the farther side of the Unstrut, and kept up an energetic fire, to which the Hanoverian artillery replied from the opposite bank. The infantry were engaged before the town, and the Hanoverian cavalry were seen on one side slowly withdrawing.

"Where shall we ride?" asked the king.

"To a hill behind Merxleben, from whence we can overlook the whole battle-field, your majesty," replied the adjutant-general.

"We are going away from the thunder of the cannon!" said the king.

"There is a turn in the road to the left," replied Colonel Dammers.

"Then we must ride to the right to keep near the fighting," said the king calmly, turning his head in the direction whence came the sound of firing. "Schweppe," he said to the major of guard cuirassiers who held his leading rein, "I command you to ride in that direction."

"There is no road, your majesty," he replied.

"Then we will ride through the fields." And the royal procession moved on, in the direction the king had indicated.

The sound of the cannon was heard nearer and nearer, mingled with the rattle of small arms.

The king and his suite rode to an eminence where the plain was bounded by a chain of hills; the party being rendered conspicuous to both sides from the dragoons, and the brilliant uniforms of the suite.

A few balls flew over their heads and the horses began to be uneasy.

Suddenly the enemy's artillery appeared to choose the king's party as their mark, and shells flew thicker and thicker over them, striking the ground now before them, now behind them.

The adjutant-general sprang to the king's side.

"Your majesty!" he cried, "we are under a heavy fire, I conjure your majesty--"

Count Platen and General von Brandis also implored the king to withdraw from such imminent peril.

The king reined in his horse.

The whole escort stood still.

"Can my troops see me here?" asked George V.

"Certainly, your majesty," replied the adjutant-general, "your majesty's position is visible from the whole of the plain."

"Good," said the king, simply. And he quietly remained on the spot.

The shells flew hissing through the air, the bullets of the small arms whistled through the valley, and the frightened horses throwing up their heads snorted and trembled; the blind king, the Guelphic prince, who was ready to give his life for what his proud heart told him was the right, halted upon the brow of the hill, motionless as a marble statue, that his soldiers might see him.

With a maddening hurrah the Hanoverian columns greeted the king as they marched past him, and sank their waving banners low before their royal master, who returned their greeting calmly and quietly each time it was announced to him.

"If we stand here much longer," said Count Ingelheim to General Brandis, "a ball will sooner or later solve the Hanoverian question in a very simple manner."

"Yes, indeed!" replied Count Platen, looking at a shell that had fallen unpleasantly near the king, "they are improving in their practice; but if we venture to tell him so we shall have to stay here all the longer."

"Your majesty," said General Brandis, riding up to the king, "there is a turn in the fighting, and I think your majesty would be more visible upon the hill which was first selected for your position."

"Are you quite sure, Brandis?" said the king.

"I am sure your majesty would be in a better position there," replied the general.

"Let us go then!" cried the king, touching his horse with the spur; it bounded forwards so rapidly that Major Schweppe had some difficulty in holding the guiding rein.

Their rapid pace soon brought them to the hill, near which the reserve cavalry were placed.

The king rode on to the highest point. His suite surrounded him, some dismounted, and followed the movements of the troops with field-glasses and telescopes.

The carriages were drawn up in a large semicircle.

The king stood motionless. Not a feature of his pale, noble face changed. The adjutant-general informed him of the course of the fighting as far as it could be made out, the gentlemen of the suite sometimes expressed by loud shouts the result of their observations, but generally they imparted to each other in low tones their hopes and fears.

Whilst this was going on at head-quarters, the Duke of Cambridge's dragoon regiment had been employed since the early morning in outpost duty near the village of Hemingsleben, on the road leading from Langensalza to Gotha.

Before the village was the toll-house with its black and white bar raised, and beside it stood the most advanced outpost.

Lieutenant von Stolzenberg commanded the outpost, and with him was his somewhat younger comrade Lieutenant von Wendenstein.

The morning sun shone brightly, and the two young officers stood near their horses, gazing over the plain, which spread far around them, and which was crossed by the grey band of the high road. Some straw lay on the ground, but none of the provisions appeared which, on the evening of their march into Göttingen, the young men had obtained for their supper.

With a weary, half-sleepy look, Wendenstein drew out his pocket flask, took a good drink and handed it to his companion. Then taking a piece of black bread from his pocket, and breaking it up, he slowly swallowed one morsel after another.

"Do you know, Stolzenberg," he said, with a slight shiver, "this sort of warfare in the chill of dawn makes one feel far from courageous. We did not think of such campaigning as this when we started."

He gave his horse a piece of bread moistened with brandy.

"No, indeed!" said Stolzenberg with a sigh, as he took a sip from the flask. "But where the devil did you get that horrid liquor from?"

"I found it at the inn in the village. What can you do? When your cognac is at an end, you must put up with potato spirit. It is a shame that we have nothing to eat and drink; there is plenty, but the provision column never comes up, and when one has a hope of getting something, the alarm is given; it is 'forwards!' again."

"Forwards!" cried Stolzenberg, "I think we have not been going forwards for long enough. And the beautiful flocks of sheep we saw on both sides of the roads, and which we dare not touch for our lives! Donnerwetter!" he cried, stamping his foot; "to be in an enemy's country and not to be allowed to requisition the necessaries of life is too much!"

"Don't you know," said Wendenstein, laughing, "that the general staff has so much to do in getting out of the enemy's way, that it has no time to remember that people must eat; and besides, it would really be difficult for the provision columns to follow our very eccentric march!"

"I cannot imagine how the king is satisfied with such a method of conducting a campaign," said Stolzenberg; "he wishes to go forwards, and these changes hither and thither do not accord with his character."

"Our poor king!" said Wendenstein, sighing; "what can he do? If indeed he could see--but as it is! It is really wonderful that he should go through the fatigue of the campaign with us."

"What is that?" exclaimed Stolzenberg, raising his glass to his eyes, and looking attentively across the plain. "Look over there, Wendenstein, just behind the bend in the road. Do you not see

a long cloud of dust?"

Wendenstein looked through his glass in the direction pointed out.

"I see bayonets glittering through the dust!" he cried, energetically; "Stolzenberg, old man, I believe it is the enemy!"

"I believe it is!" he replied, still gazing at the distant cloud of dust. "There is no doubt of it! A column of infantry, and there!--artillery, too! Wendenstein, ride back at once, and say a column of infantry and artillery are advancing on the road from Gotha!"

"Hurrah!" cried Wendenstein, as he sprang into the saddle and galloped back to the village.

Stolzenberg and his dragoons were in the saddle in a moment. Drawn up in order upon the road, they looked anxiously over the plain. The cloud of dust slowly grew nearer, and they could see more plainly the bright flashing of the bayonets.

After a short time horsemen from the village joined the outpost. The colonel in command of the regiment, Count Kielmansegge, came, accompanied by his staff with Lieutenant von Wendenstein.

"Look there, sir!" cried Stolzenberg, and pointed to the enemy's approaching columns.

The colonel looked earnestly for a moment through his glass.

"It is certainly the enemy!" he cried, "and see! there is a battery being posted upon yonder hill. All outposts to fall back on their squadrons!" cried he to his staff, who galloped off immediately.

Stolzenberg recalled his vedettes.

"And what will the regiment do, if I may be allowed to ask?" he said, turning to his colonel.

"Slowly retire, whilst skirmishing with the enemy, such is the order," he replied, sighing and shrugging his shoulders; and he hastened back to the village to which the other outposts had already withdrawn.

"Retire, always retire!" cried Wendenstein, passionately. "Well! some time or other they will reckon on these tactics without the troops!"

There was a sudden flash from the hill, followed by an explosion, and a cannon ball splintered the bar of the toll-house on the high road.

"The overture begins!" cried Stolzenberg; and with his few men he trotted quickly back to the village.

This was the shot they heard at head-quarters in Thamsbrück.

The regiment withdrew, constantly skirmishing with the enemy, and fell back slowly upon Langensalza.

In the meantime the town was abandoned, the order of the general in command ran, "that the army whilst fighting should retreat."

At Langensalza the dragoons fell in with the infantry of the Knesebeck Brigade, which had received orders to retire behind the Unstrut. The troops obeyed this order with gnashing of teeth, and gave up one position after the other, for the enemy forthwith to seize upon; the enemy's riflemen harassed them, and the artillery advancing along the heights opened a nearer and more murderous fire.

The dragoons crossed the bridge over the Unstrut, and made a stand before the village of Merxleben, on the slope of the Kirchberg hill, from whose summit a Hanoverian battery maintained a fire, which, though less rapid than the Prussian, was so well directed that it did great execution in the hostile ranks.

To the right of the dragoons, General Knesebeck's brigade was massed, he having followed the command he had received to retire. On the other side of the Unstrut stood a mill, upon a small stream called the Salzabach; immediately after the retreat of the Hanoverians it was occupied by the Prussians, and from it they kept up a heavy fire.

Two battalions of the guards marched past the dragoons. At the head of the first rode Lieutenant-Colonel von Landesberg; the second was led by Colonel von Alten.

The battalions had crossed the Unstrut, and were following the order received to retire to the brigade stationed on the hill.

Colonel von Landesberg rode thoughtfully in front of his battalion, the grenadiers followed him in solemn silence.

The battalion had the Unstrut on the left, and had just reached a spot where it was forced to turn to the right, to take up the prescribed position.

At this place the banks of the river are very low, and it is so shallow that it is easy to cross it.

A level terrace surrounds the hill, upon the slope of which lies the village of Merxleben. The enemy's most advanced chain of skirmishers was approaching the opposite bank of the river.

Colonel von Landesberg gave a searching look at the situation.

"If this spot remains undefended," he said to his adjutant, "the enemy will penetrate our position, and divide our forces."

"So it seems to me, colonel," replied the adjutant. "I cannot see why it is to be abandoned,--however, the general staff--"

The colonel gnawed his moustache.

"It is impossible to give up this position to the enemy," he said, half to himself.

His eyes flashed, and he pulled in his horse suddenly.

"Battalion, halt!" he shouted.

The command was repeated along the ranks; the battalion halted. With excited faces the grenadiers awaited further orders from their leader.

"Right about turn!" he cried.

A thundering shout of joy broke as from one mouth along the ranks, and in an instant the grenadiers had fronted.

The enemy's sharpshooters appeared on the other side of the river.

"Skirmishers, forward!" cried Colonel von Landesberg.

The lines opened out with exemplary precision, and in a short time the Hanoverian skirmishers were close to the river, received by the fire of the enemy.

Several grenadiers fell; but the firing from the Hanoverian lines was so certain and regular, that the most advanced of the enemy's sharpshooters soon sought cover, and replied but feebly.

The second battalion of guards had come up in the meantime. Colonel von Alten galloped up to Colonel von Landesberg, who had ridden down to the river, and was in the midst of his men.

"What is going on here?" asked Alten; "is the plan for the day changed?"

"You see this spot," said Colonel von Landesberg,--"it must not be taken, and I mean to hold it."

"Have you received an order?" asked Colonel von Alten.

"I do not want an order, for I see that the fate of the day and of the army depends on its being kept," cried Landesberg. "Fire!"

The report of fire-arms rolled along the line.

Colonel von Alten gave a scrutinizing look around, then he rode back to his battalion, which was about a hundred paces off.

"Right about turn!" he cried.

The battalion replied, like the first, with an echoing "Hurrah!" A few moments afterwards his sharpshooters were drawn up along the bank of the Unstrut, and the advancing enemy found itself opposed by a steady fire.

Although the grenadiers fell, the lines filled up silently and regularly, and not an inch of ground was yielded. Colonel von Landesberg placed himself in the front ranks, cool and calm as if on parade.

The battalions of the enemy which had advanced to the river halted. An uneasy movement appeared amongst them. An aide-de-camp galloped up.

"Colonel," he cried, "the general expects you in the prescribed position!"

"Tell him I am engaged by the enemy!" replied von Landesberg curtly.

The aide-de-camp glanced at what was going on, saluted, turned his horse, and galloped back without a word.

The enemy's fire grew weaker. After a short time, bugle calls were heard on the opposite bank, and the enemy was withdrawn out of reach of fire. Colonel von Landesberg put up his sword. "So," said he, "the first thing is done; do you think the river is fordable?"

"Certainly!" replied the adjutant, riding down close to it; "I can see the bottom almost everywhere."

"We can swim if needful," said Landesberg, calmly. "They shall rest ten minutes, then I will go first."

Colonel de Vaux's brigade stood at some little distance, close to the village of Merxleben; the Cambridge dragoons were halted near the banks of the Unstrut. The officers looked anxiously at the movements of the troops, who were retiring on the two wings, the centre keeping up an energetic artillery fire.

"We have crossed the Unstrut," exclaimed von Wendenstein; "it is really scandalous--where will this retreat end? We shall go back and back, until we march into the jaws of the enemy coming down upon us from the north, and then--"

"Then at last we shall capitulate," said von Stolzenberg, bitterly; "this kind of war can have no other end."

Lieutenant-Colonel Kielmansegge trotted quickly up to the troop in which the young officers rode.

"Look there, gentlemen," he cried, and pointed to the river bank at some distance along the plain. "What is that?--active firing is going on there."

"They are exchanging shots as they retreat--the Knesebeck Brigade it must be," said von Wendenstein.

"We shall soon have the enemy on our flank," said Stolzenberg; and both the officers took their glasses and looked in the direction in which Count Kielmansegge was still gazing attentively.

"It is the guards," said von Stolzenberg, "and actually they are not retreating, they have made a stand on the bank!"

"The enemy's sharpshooters are retreating!" exclaimed Wendenstein joyfully.

"They halt," said Count Kielmansegge, still looking through his glass,--"our battalions form,--they are going down to the river--into it--hurrah!" he cried, "they are advancing to the attack."

"And we are standing still here," cried von Wendenstein, whilst he drew his sword half out of the scabbard, and put it back with a clang.

At this moment Colonel de Vaux galloped up with the brigade staff.

"The guards are crossing the Unstrut," cried Count Kielmansegge, as they came up.

"So I see!" exclaimed Colonel de Vaux, "and devil take me if I stand still here; now the die must be cast. It is bad enough that we shall have to retake all the positions we have so quietly abandoned to the enemy! What regiments are close here?" he enquired of his adjutant.

"The first battalion of the second regiment, and the first Jäger battalion," he replied.

"Bring them here at once."

The adjutant galloped to the columns close by, and led them at quick march up to the colonel.

He dismounted and placed himself at their head.

"And what shall I do?" asked Count Kielmansegge.

"Ride down by the river," replied de Vaux, "cross where you can, and act according to circumstances; if possible fall on the right flank of the enemy, and silence that hostile battery."

"At your command, colonel!" cried Kielmansegge. In a few moments the regiments formed and rode at a sharp trot along the river.

From the place where the two battalions of guards had crossed the stream, a heavy fire had commenced. The first battalion under the gallant Landesberg advanced slowly in a straight line upon Langensalza, the second battalion turned to the left towards the mill which formed the central point of the enemy's position, and which was in a diagonal line from Colonel de Vaux.

"Now is the time!" he cried, and commanding his adjutant to give the order to advance, he at the same time ordered the assault to be sounded.

Before him lay an even plain without any cover for about five hundred yards, part of it being thickly planted with rape. The whole of this plain was exposed to the fire of the enemy's lines,

and of the artillery from the hill behind.

The drums beat, the colonel raised his sword, and in as perfect order as on the parade ground the battalions marched across the dangerous plain.

The enemy's fire tore great gaps in the ranks, for the soldiers could not advance quickly on account of the rape, but they were quietly filled up; and in a short time the battalion gained the bank of the river, and in its turn opened a murderous fire upon the enemy, who withdrew his skirmishers, and concentrated his whole force around the mill.

The whole army saw the guards cross the Unstrut and the bold advance of Colonel de Vaux, and a general offensive movement commenced.

No officer would wait for orders. With a loud "Hurrah!" the troops broke from their positions, and advanced to the points where they might most quickly meet the enemy, and where they thought they could take the most active part in the fighting.

The infantry crossed the Unstrut at all points, sometimes even by swimming, and pressed on towards the enemy's positions. The batteries which had already retired, advanced and supported the attack by an incessant fire, and the cavalry crossed the river wherever it was possible, and advanced to the scene of combat.

The enemy were concentrated in force around the mill already mentioned, which formed the key of the central position of the Prussian army. It was surrounded by a deep moat.

Against this mill the guards advanced; two bridges over the river were before them, closed by barricades and strongly defended.

A company advanced without halting from the hill, led by their captain; they took the bridge by storm, and from this side also pressed on towards the mill; single lieutenants led small detachments everywhere, wading or swimming across the river, and advanced on every side to storm the enemy's strong position.

By this time desperate fighting was going on before the mill. Companies of different regiments, sometimes in small detachments, united to storm the buildings.

Three times Lieutenants Köring, Leue, and Schneider with exemplary courage led a storming party, Lieutenant Leue falling riddled with bullets, at the head of his detachment. Their numbers were too small, the moat around the mill was too deep, the fire too overwhelming.

Just then Colonel Dammers appeared to inspect the state of the battle and to report the news to the king. Prince Herman Solms rode beside him, for the young prince, devoured with impatience, had obtained permission to accompany the colonel.

The sadly diminished ranks were just closing, again to attempt the storming of the mill.

A Prussian battery had been brought forward and the shells suddenly fell amongst the storming party, whilst a fresh and tremendous fire from the needle-guns opened upon them from the mill.

They hesitated under this murderous hail of balls.

The prince touched his horse with the spur, and bounded between the storming party and the mill.

"They are not so bad as they look!" he cried cheerfully, turning to the soldiers; and reining in his horse, he took off his cap and jokingly saluted a shell which flew over his head and buried itself in the ground.

"Hurrah!" cried the soldiers, and again rushed to the attack, led on by their brave lieutenants.

At this moment two companies advanced from the bridges, and immediately behind them Colonel Flökher's battalion, and at the same time guns opened behind the storming party from the hill of Merxleben, and a heavy fire from a hastily advanced Hanoverian battery fell on the mill, splintering the roof and shattering the walls.

The gallant defenders of the building evidently about to become a heap of ruins, broke through on the other side, and retreated in strong parties along the high road. But they were checked by the second battalion of guards, which had now come up, and which opened a murderous fire upon their flank, whilst two squadrons of hussars who had burst over the bridges galloped down upon them with upraised swords.

Some of the fugitives fled over the fields, and were fortunate enough to gain the reserve Prussian division; the hindmost returned to the ruined building, and a white handkerchief soon waved from one of the windows.

The firing ceased immediately. Colonel Flökher rode up to the battered door, which was quickly opened, and the last of the brave defenders, about a hundred men, laid down their arms.

The courtyard was full of dead and wounded, and just outside lay the Hanoverian soldiers who had fallen. The ruin looked ghastly with its shattered windows and broken walls in the bright sunshine, a picture of destruction, horror, and death.

The adjutant-general rode up to Prince Herman.

"I compliment you, prince," he said: "you received your baptism of fire gloriously, but you exposed yourself uselessly. What should I have said to the king if any misfortune had befallen you?"

"What could I do?" said the prince, laughing, and plucking at the down on his upper lip; "the king has ordered me to head-quarters: ought I to let them say I am afraid of fire?"

"They would not have said that," said the colonel, looking kindly at the almost boyish face.

"It is better that they cannot say it!" cried the prince, and galloped off with the adjutant-general.

A retreat on the part of the enemy was decided upon from this moment. Slowly and in perfect order, under a continuous fire, the Prussian troops formed in squares, and retired in the direction of Gotha covered by their batteries, which kept up a constant fire upon the advancing Hanoverians.

At last General Arentschildt had ordered a general attack, but this command only affected a few of the troops, and was indeed superfluous, for the attack had commenced, and no order would have prevented it.

Whilst the centre of the Prussian position was pierced, Count Kielmansegge with his dragoons had ridden along the side of the Unstrut, endeavouring to find a ford. But he could not discover one, the banks of the river in this part being very steep and overgrown with bushes. They were obliged to ride down stream to the village of Nagelstedt, where at last they found a bridge, over which they crossed into an open field on the other side.

The dragoons hurried at a sharp trot closer and closer to the sound of the guns; already the enemy was driven back, and the battle had surged to the south of Langensalza.

A gentle eminence rose before the dragoons, the regiment rode up it, and found itself opposite the enemy's exposed flank. Two Prussian squares were slowly retreating, still keeping up a constant fire, and on a hill near the dragoons was a Prussian battery, which sent its shell into the centre of the advancing Hanoverians. The dragoons were alone; between them and the Hanoverian army were the Prussian battalions.

"The time has come at last!" said Wendenstein, who was with the troop of which Stolzenberg was first lieutenant. "Thank God! we have something to do. At such a moment it is better to be in love," he added, as he tried whether his sword was firm in his hand; "you see I know what to think of, and--"

"There, again it spoke," said Stolzenberg, shuddering slightly; "farewell, old fellow, if we do not meet again."

"Madness!" cried von Wendenstein, "but look out, we are to charge."

The command was given that the fourth squadron should take the enemy's battery, and that the second and third should attack the Prussian squares.

The two squadrons slowly advanced towards the distant squares, who stood still to receive them, whilst Rittmeister von Einem at the head of his dragoons galloped up the hill on which stood the battery.

The guns were turned upon the attacking dragoons, a storm of shell received the squadron. The horsemen fell in numbers, down went both the trumpeters, but unchecked, the squadron galloped onwards, the Rittmeister far before them waving high his sword.

Quicker and quicker grew the pace, the battery was almost reached, when once again the guns opened fire, and sent their case-shot into the very midst of the gallant riders.

The Rittmeister escaped as by a miracle. He was the first to spring between the hostile cannon, and he smote down a gunner with a mighty cut from his sword; the dragoons followed him through the heavy fire of the infantry support to the battery.

A bullet hit the Rittmeister's horse, which fell, rolling over upon him. He quickly disengaged himself from the quivering animal, and his sword flow round swift as lightning to defend himself from the threatening bayonets of the infantry. The dragoons were now engaged in a fierce hand-to-hand fight.

"Forwards! forwards!" cried the Rittmeister, as with his sword he parried a bayonet thrust against his breast; but a shot fired close to him struck him, his arm sank down, and whilst with his left hand he seized the wheel of the cannon he had taken, to support himself, several of the

enemy's bayonets were plunged deep into his breast.

His strength failed, and he fell upon a heap of slain; his hand clenched in death, held fast the wheel of the conquered gun. The dragoons pressed forwards over him, and soon the last defenders of the battery fled over the field.

The battery was silenced, but the greater number of the dragoons lay around their fallen leader.

This attack had been watched with the greatest interest by the two squadrons as they advanced slowly towards the Prussian squares, and as the defenders of the battery fled, loud cheers burst forth.

When the two squadrons had come near enough to the squares to charge, suddenly from behind the hill on which the battery stood, galloped the garde du corps, followed by the cuirassier guards. The garde du corps dashed against the square next them. Two volleys, discharged when they were close to the enemy, did not check them, but the brave square stood unbroken, and the squadron of garde du corps retired from the enemy's fire, preparing to charge afresh.

The commander of the second square nearest to the dragoons came forward and waved a handkerchief. Major von Hammerstein, with his adjutant and a trumpeter, advanced to meet him.

"My soldiers are ready to sink from exhaustion," said the Prussian staff-officer; "I am willing to surrender."

"I must then beg for your sword, my comrade," replied Major von Hammerstein, "and that you will lay down your arms."

"I agree to the last," said the Prussian officer; "to give up my sword is too hard a condition. But," he cried, "here come the cuirassiers."

And indeed the cuirassiers, who had followed the garde du corps, and passing by the first square had formed to charge, were galloping down upon them.

"Ride to the cuirassiers and stop them!" cried Major von Hammerstein to his adjutant.

He galloped off to meet the charging regiment, but their rapid movement and the noise around prevented him from making himself heard. They rushed onwards.

"Too late!" cried the Prussian commander. "Stand to your arms! Fire!" he cried, as he returned to the square, and a tremendous volley mowed down the cuirassiers just as they approached. The foremost ranks fell, and the direction of the charge being somewhat oblique, the shock came on the flank of the square, and it remained unbroken.

Major von Hammerstein had ridden back, and "Charge! charge!" resounded down the ranks of the dragoons.

The two squadrons charged the square at a gallop.

They were received by a frightful fire. The major fell, just in front of the foe, but Lieutenant von Stolzenberg urged on his horse, reined him in for a moment when close to the lowered bayonets of the enemy, drove the spurs into his horse's flanks, so that he reared upright, and then, with one mighty leap, bore his young master, as he raised his sword and gave a ringing cheer, right into the hostile square, where, like his rider, he fell, pierced through with bayonets.

But his fall tore a large opening in the ranks, and the squadron pressed in after them.

"Well done, old fellow!" cried Wendenstein, and at the same moment he fell beside his comrade, and the dragoons rushed over him.

The square was broken, and those who yet survived fled madly across the field.

But when the dragoon squadrons reassembled, not one officer was left, and one-third of the men were wanting.

The cuirassiers had rallied meanwhile, and hastened to the scene of this brilliant struggle.

A young soldier rode with the first squadron in an old coat that had evidently not been made for him, and in plain grey trousers stuffed into military boots. On his head he wore a military cap, and a wound on his brow was bound up with a white handkerchief.

"Where is Lieutenant von Wendenstein?" he asked of a dragoon, as the remains of the second squadron rode up.

"All our officers lie there!" replied the dragoon, pointing to a heap of men and horses which marked the spot where the square had stood.

"Dead!" cried the cuirassier. "But I cannot leave him there; I promised to take care of him, and no one shall ever say Fritz Deyke broke his word. My poor lieutenant!"

He hastily quitted the ranks and rode up to the commanding officer.

"Sir," he said, saluting him, "I overtook the army at Langensalza and joined the cuirassiers, that I might take my share in the war. I hope, sir, you can say I have done my duty?"

"You have done bravely," replied the officer.

"Well, sir," continued the young man, "the day's work seems over, and, besides, I have a scratch from which the blood runs into my eyes, so I came to ask leave for the day."

The officer looked at him with amazement. A deep blush spread over the young soldier's face.

"Sir," he cried, "I was brought up at Blechow with our president's son, Lieutenant von Wendenstein, of the Cambridge dragoons; and when I left home to join the army, his mother said to me, 'Fritz, take care of my son if you can,' and I promised her I would, sir; and now there lies the young gentleman amongst the dead. Shall I leave him there?"

The officer looked kindly at him.

"Go, my brave lad," he said, "and come back when the lieutenant no longer needs you."

"Thank you, sir," cried Fritz.

The cuirassiers advanced in pursuit of the enemy.

Meanwhile the other square had been broken by the charge of the garde du corps. The cavalry had moved forward, and in a short time the scene of all this carnage, of all this noise, was only an empty plain, where piles of corpses lay one on another in lakes of blood--men and horses, friend and foe, mingled together.

Fritz Deyke was alone in this scene of horror.

He dismounted, led his horse by the bridle, and walked to the place where the dragoons had broken the square. His horse snorted and struggled to run back. He led it a little way off and tied it to the trunk of a tree which grew near the high road; then he again approached the heaps of slain.

Some wounded men raised their heads and begged gaspingly for a drop of water.

"I cannot help all, but you shall not perish," he said.

There was a deep ditch near the high road; it might have water in it. He seized two helmets lying on the ground, and hurried to the ditch. There was actually some water--a little, and dirty, for the continuous heat had sucked up the moisture.

With some difficulty he filled the helmets with the muddy, lukewarm fluid, and carrying them like two buckets, he returned to the wounded men, who were watching for him with unspeakable longing. He drew out his flask, poured some of its contents into each helmet, and gave some of the liquid to the sufferers, impartially succouring both Prussians and Hanoverians.

"So, be patient," he said, kindly; "the first ambulance I see, I will send to you." And he began to search amongst the dead.

They lay heaped on one another, the brave dragoons and the brave Prussian infantry, some with a calm, peaceful expression on their faces, some with a look of wild horror, many so frightfully disfigured with bullets and stabs that the soldier's brave heart quailed, and he had to close his eyes for a moment to gain strength to continue his dreadful employment.

But he went on undeterred. He laid the dead bodies aside, and exerting all his strength, he dragged at the dead horses.

"Here is Herr von Stolzenberg!" he cried, as he turned over the body of the young officer, which lay with its face on the ground, bathed in blood. "Handsome, brave gentleman! and to die so young! It is all over with him," he said, mournfully. A bullet had carried away part of the skull, and countless stabs still oozed with blood.

Fritz Deyke bowed his head over the corpse, folded his hands, and repeated "Our Father."

"But here," he then cried, "lies poor Roland, stone dead. Good, faithful creature; and under him, alas! there is my lieutenant!" He pushed the dead horse aside.

Beneath lay Lieutenant von Wendenstein, pale and stark, his left hand pressed on his breast, his sword still in his right hand, his eyes wide open, and staring glassily at the sky.

"Dead!" said poor Fritz, with a cry of grief; "he is really dead!" and he bent sorrowfully over the body of the fallen officer.

"But I must take him away!" he cried, with decision. "He must not stay here; at least I must be able to lead his poor old father and mother to his grave. How frightful to see his kind, beautiful eyes staring thus!" he said, shuddering; "but where is he wounded? The head is unhurt. Ah! here in the breast. His hand is pressed upon it; the blood still trickles. But I cannot look at his eyes!" he cried; "those dead, glassy eyes, which in life were so kind and merry!"

He bent down and laid his hand on the head of the slain, that he might gently close the eyes of his former playmate.

"God in heaven!" he cried, suddenly. "He lives, his eyelids moved!"

He folded his hands and gazed anxiously at the face before him.

The eyes really moved, they closed slowly, then they opened again; for one moment a ray of light seemed to light them up, then they grew staring and glassy as before.

Fritz Deyke sank upon his knees.

"Great God in heaven!" he said in a trembling voice; "if Thou wilt never in my whole life hear a prayer from me again, yet help me now to save my poor master!"

He seized his flask, opened the mouth of the wounded man, and poured into it a little brandy.

Then he anxiously awaited the result.

An almost imperceptible shiver passed through the young officer's limbs; his eyes lived for a moment, and looked inquiringly at the young peasant; his lips were slightly parted; a red foam appeared upon them, and a deep sigh heaved his breast.

Then the eyelids closed, and the face lost the horrible starkness of death. But no further sign of life appeared.

"Now to get him to the town!" cried Fritz, raising the young officer in his strong arms and bearing him to his horse.

He climbed with difficulty into the saddle, still holding the motionless form; then he supported it before him with his right hand, whilst he held the bridle with the other.

He rode quickly across the fields to the town.

The squares broken by the dragoons, garde du corps, and cuirassiers, and the battery taken by Rittmeister von Einem made the last resistance on the side of the Prussians before they retreated entirely.

The Hanoverian central brigade pressed onwards, and soon the whole battle-field almost to Gotha was in possession of the Hanoverian troops.

The army, unfit to march, had made the most surprising, though alas! aimless advances--the army unfit to fight, had fought--and won!

During the whole day the king and his suite had remained on the hill near Merxleben. He had not left the saddle for a moment. He had asked short questions about the fighting, which the gentlemen of his suite had answered; no information had come from the general in command, for the battle was fought by individual officers and their divisions, who would no longer retreat, and who had seized on the offensive, each where he thought he could act most decisively and effectively.

The king saw nothing; he heard the bullets hiss past him, the thunder of the cannon around him; but the varied living picture was wanting that enchains the mind with trembling excitement.

He was as motionless as a bronze statue; his face betrayed no trace of his inward emotion; his only inquiry was, could his soldiers see him?

At last the adjutant-general galloped up the hill, and brought the news that the enemy's centre was pierced, and the cuirassier guards who had been held in reserve behind the king's position, rushed past with a loud "Hurrah!" to their royal leader, as they started across the plain in pursuit of the enemy. Finally, a staff officer arrived from the commanding general, announcing that the victory was decided in favour of the Hanoverian arms. Then the king drew a deep breath and said, "I will dismount."

A groom hastened to him; the king got off his horse. All the gentlemen around drew near him to express their congratulations.

"Many brave and faithful hearts have ceased to beat! God grant them eternal peace!" said the king, solemnly.

He stood for a moment in silent thought.

"I am somewhat exhausted," he then said; "is there anything to drink?"

Those nearest to him seized their flasks; they were empty.

"There is some sherry in our carriage," said Meding.

"And I have a travelling cup," cried Count Platen, taking a silver cup from a case.

Meding ran to the carriage, and soon returned with half a bottle of sherry and a little wheaten bread. He poured some wine into the small cup, and handed it to the king. He drank it, and ate a morsel of bread.

"Now I am strong again," he cried; "would to God that each one of my soldiers could say the same."

"I will move about a little," he then said, and taking Meding's arm he paced slowly to and fro, on the top of the hill.

"God has given our arms the victory," he said with emotion; "what is next to be done?"

"Your majesty," said Meding, "this noble blood will all have been shed in vain, if we do not march at once to Gotha, cross the railway, and endeavour to reach Bavaria."

The king sighed.

"Oh! that I could place myself at the head of my army and lead it onwards! They will make difficulties, raise obstacles. You know how many obstacles the general staff has already raised in the council of war."

He stood still, thinking deeply.

"Your majesty must command a protocol to be drawn up, that these obstacles may at least be stated in black and white," said Meding.

"It shall be done!" cried the king with energy. "You shall draw it up. I am answerable to history for what occurs, and for what is neglected."

An aide-de-camp from the general in command galloped up.

"General von Arentschildt begs your majesty at once to take up your head-quarters in Langensalza."

"To horse!" cried the king.

The aide-de-camp hurried away, the horses were brought, and the royal party moved down from the hill across the battle-field.

The king was grave and calm as he rode towards the town. Heaps of dead bodies lay on the road near the mill, and the horses' hoofs were reddened by the blood which stood on the ground in great pools. The king saw it not. He heard the "hurrahs" of the soldiers he met, and the loud cheers with which they greeted him; no pride of victory kindled in his noble face; he sat on his horse cold and silent; he thought of the slain, who had bought him this victory with their lives, he thought of the future, and with anxious care he asked himself whether this victory would yield the fruit desired, and extricate the army from the dangerous position into which it had been led.

The royal head-quarters were established in the Schützhaus at Langensalza.

Scarcely was the king a little refreshed, when he ordered the general in command, and the chief of the general staff to be summoned, and he invited General von Brandis, Count Platen, Count Ingelheim, with Lex and Meding, to be present at the council of war.

At about nine in the evening the officers assembled in the king's room.

The king urged an immediate march upon Gotha, but the general in command and the chief of the staff declared that the army was in such a state of exhaustion it could not march. In vain General Brandis pointed out that even for a tired army a short march of two hours and then excellent quarters in Gotha, was better than a bivouac in the fields without proper food; the chief of the general staff declared the march to be absolutely impossible, and the general in command refused to be responsible for its consequences. Both these gentlemen asked earnestly for permission to leave the council, as their presence with the troops was absolutely necessary.

The council of war broke up without any result, and the king retired to rest after the fatigues of the day.

The bivouac fires of the troops shone all around the town; and such merry songs, such cheerful voices rose on every side, it was hard to believe these were the exhausted soldiers who could not possibly undertake a two hours' march to Gotha, there to find rest and food.

Fritz Deyke meanwhile had ridden to the town, carrying Lieutenant von Wendenstein before

him, without knowing whether he was alive or dead. The young man lay heavily in his arms, his limbs hung helplessly down, and the wound in his breast bled afresh from the quick ride.

The young peasant reached the town, but there had been fighting in the streets, and it seemed deserted by its inhabitants, who had shut themselves into the back rooms of their houses.

"Where shall I find the best quarters?" he asked himself. "Perhaps they will take the greatest care of him in the hotel," he thought, after a moment's consideration, and he rode on in search of an inn. At a turn in the street he saw a large white house standing a little back, with a well-kept garden in front of it, and with various outbuildings beside it. Green jalousie blinds were closed over the windows.

As the cuirassier rode past with the lifeless body in his arms, a fresh young voice cried, half in fear, half in compassion:

"Ah! the poor young officer!"

Fritz was touched by the sound of the voice, as well as by this mark of sympathy for his dear lieutenant, and looked up at the house.

A young girl's pretty blonde head peeped from a half-opened shutter, but bashfully withdrew as the soldier looked up; the blind, however, was not entirely closed.

Either the expressive voice, or the sympathy in the bright blue eyes still looking down through the small opening upon the strange and melancholy spectacle, caused the young man to conclude, that in this comfortable and well-to-do looking house he should find good quarters for his beloved officer: it was enough, he reined in his horse, and cried out--

"Yes, the poor young officer needs rest and care, and I demand quarters for him in this house."

The words were short and commanding, for he belonged to the army who entered the town as victors; but the tone of voice was gentle and imploring, and it caused the young girl to open the shutter entirely, and to stretch out her head. At the same moment, a stout, elderly man, with a full red face and short grey hair, appeared, and looked down with displeasure at the Hanoverian soldier.

"Quarters can be had in this house, if so it must be," he said, curtly and uncivilly; "but as to care, we have nothing to do with that, and there is nothing much to eat!"

"I will see to that!" cried Fritz Deyke, "only come down and help me to carry in my lieutenant!"

The old man withdrew from the window grumbling, whilst the young girl called out kindly, "I will get a bed ready at once for the poor wounded man, then we shall see what must be done next."

And she disappeared from the window.

The old man had opened the house door, and advanced towards the horseman.

"I cannot bid you welcome to my house," he said, gloomily and harshly, "for you belong to the enemies of my king and country, but I am bound to give you quarters; and," he continued, looking compassionately at the pale young officer, "I would rather give quarters to the wounded than to the sound."

"It is no question of friend or foe!" replied Fritz, in a conciliatory voice; "it is a question of Christian charity to a poor wounded man!"

"Come then!" said the old man, simply, and walked up to the horse.

Fritz Deyke let the lifeless form slide gently into the old man's arms; then dismounting, he tied his horse to the low garden railings, and together they bore the lifeless form to the house.

"Up here," said the old man, pointing to the stairs which led from the hall to the comfortable rooms above.

Fritz Deyke went up first, carefully supporting the lieutenant's head, whilst the old man followed, bearing him.

They entered a long passage with doors on each side.

The young girl stood waiting for them, and hastened forwards to open the door of a large room, with two windows looking towards the courtyard; it was furnished plainly but with some elegance, and a snow-white bed was prepared for the sufferer.

Fritz Deyke, with the help of the old man, laid the wounded officer gently down upon it.

"Now, young man!" said his host, looking gravely at the cuirassier, "your officer is safe, and he shall want for nothing that my house can afford,--the house of the Brewer Lohmeier," he added,

with a look of dignified satisfaction, "that you may know whose guest you are. Come now, we will take your horse into the stable; and," he continued somewhat confidentially, "whilst you are here, keep others away if you can."

They went down stairs, leaving the young girl in the room with the wounded man. She smoothed the pillows, and looked with melancholy interest at the handsome face, pale as death.

Some infantry came down the street.

"We will find quarters in this street," cried one of them; "see, here is a nice-looking house,--let us go in,--there will be room for us all!"

Fritz Deyke came to the door at this moment with the brewer.

"Ah! there are cuirassiers here already," cried the infantry man; "is there still room, comrade?"

Fritz put his finger to his lips.

"A dangerously-wounded officer here," he said; "you must not talk so loud, nor make such a noise in marching."

"Then we must go further," said the infantry soldiers; they cast sympathizing looks at the upper windows, and walked on.

"Thank you!" said the old brewer, in a friendly voice.

Fritz Deyke led his horse through the yard gate to the stable, where he put him with the brewer's four horses. He then asked for a piece of chalk, and wrote in large letters upon the house door: "Dangerously wounded officers."

"Now," he cried, "I must go and find a surgeon; take care of my lieutenant, but do not move him!" He was about to hurry away.

"Stop," said the brewer, "your surgeons will all be busy at the field hospitals; our surgeon lives close here, he is a clever man, I will fetch him."

He went out, and soon returned with a fresh-faced, grey-headed old gentleman, with a very kind expression.

He stepped up to the bed, whilst Fritz studied his looks with the greatest anxiety.

The surgeon shook his head, he opened one of the closed eye-lids, looked at the eye of the wounded man, and said,

"Life is not extinct, whether we can retain it is in God's hand! I must look at the wounds, we must undress him, and you, dear Margaret, get us some warm water and some wine."

The young girl hastened away. Fritz carefully cut off the wounded man's clothes and boots.

There was a wound in the left breast, another in the shoulder.

"This is nothing," said the surgeon, pointing to the shoulder, "a bayonet wound, which will get well of itself; but here--" drawing a probe from a case, he examined the wound in the breast.

"The bullet has lodged upon the rib," he said; "if he does not die from loss of blood and exhaustion he may recover. For the present he must have perfect rest; I cannot attempt to extract the bullet until he has in some measure recovered his strength."

Margaret returned with warm water, linen, and a sponge. She then placed a small lamp upon the table, for it began to grow dark.

The surgeon washed the wound, and poured some wine into his patient's mouth. A deep breath parted his lips, a faint tinge of colour came to his cheeks, and he opened his eyes. He looked with surprise at everything around him; his eyes closed again, and scarcely audibly he murmured "Auf Wiedersehn!"

The young girl folded her hands, and raised her eyes, shining through tears to heaven.

Fritz took off his cap, waved it in the air and opened his mouth wide, as if to shout the Hurrah! with which the lusty young peasants made the meadows near Blechow or the large room in the inn echo again, but this Hurrah! did not come; the mouth closed again, the cap flew into a corner, only a thankful, happy expression replaced the melancholy look his face had hitherto worn. He had heard a sound of life from the lips of his dear lieutenant, he now hoped to save him.

"Well, well," said the surgeon cheerfully, "for the present you can only keep him quiet, and give him some red wine as often as possible, to repair the loss of blood; to-morrow I will try to extract the bullet."

He departed, accompanied by old Lohmeier.

Fritz, Deyke, and Margaret remained with the patient, and watched his breathing; with the greatest punctuality the young girl handed a spoonful of wine to the cuirassier, who poured it carefully into the officer's mouth.

Old Lohmeier brought Fritz some cold supper and a draught of his own beer. The young man hastily despatched the supper, his appetite was as good as ever, the beer he declined.

"I could not keep awake," he said.

"Now go to bed, Margaret," said her father, "we will tend the wounded man; sitting up at night will tire you."

"What is the loss of one night's sleep, father," said Margaret, "when a man's life is in danger? Let me stay, he might want something."

Her father did not gainsay her, and his look of satisfaction acknowledged she was right. Fritz Deyke said nothing, but he raised his large true-hearted blue eyes with an expression of gratitude to the young girl's face.

Lohmeier seated himself in an armchair and soon nodded; the young people remained near the bed, and scrupulously carried out the surgeon's orders, watching with pleasure every fresh sign of life in their patient, sometimes a deep breath, sometimes a slight flush passing over his pale face.

For a long time they sat in silence.

"You are a good girl," Fritz said at last, when she had just handed him a spoonful of wine, and he held out his hand to her in hearty friendship; "how thankful my lieutenant's mother will be to you, for what you have done for her son."

"Ah! his poor mother!" she said with emotion, responding to the warm pressure of his hand, whilst a tear shone in her clear eyes; "is she a great lady?"

Fritz Deyke imparted to her in low whispers all about the lieutenant's family, and the old house in Blechow, and he told her of beautiful Wendland, with its rich pastures and dark fir woods, and then of his own home, of his father, and the farm and acres; and the young girl listened silently and attentively to the soldier's words. The pictures they presented were so natural, so clear and so bright, and they were all gilded by the poetic shimmer surrounding the brave cuirassier, who had saved his playmate in the bloody battle-field, and who now watched so anxiously over the life still so precarious.

The night passed quietly in old Lohmeier's house. Loud, merry voices rang without, from the soldiers quartered in the town, and from the bivouacs, and when the old brewer sometimes woke he glanced benevolently at the young soldier and the wounded officer, whose presence prevented his house from being otherwise occupied, for all the troops had respected the words Fritz had written on the door. No one had knocked, but all had passed it in silence.

The morning of the 28th June dawned brilliantly, as if to greet the victorious soldiers in their cantonments. Already all was movement at head-quarters. The king in a proclamation to the army had expressed in a few affectionate words his thanks for their exertions and courage.

Then the burial of the dead took place. They were interred, so far as they could be found on the battle-field, in the churchyard of Langensalza.

The king with his suite stood near the open graves, whilst the clergyman of the little town, in a few simple words, commended to eternal rest the warriors united in death, Prussians and Hanoverians; and the king, who could not see the brave men who lay at his feet, true soldiers of duty and of their rightful lord, stooped down in silence, seized a handful of earth, and with his own royal hand strewed the first dust upon the loyal dead.

"May the earth lay lightly on you!" whispered the king, and in a still lower voice he added, "Happy are they who rest in peace!"

Then he folded his hands, repeated the Lord's Prayer, and taking the arm of the crown prince, returned to the Schützhaus.

On his way back, groups of soldiers who stood about greeted him with loud "Hurrahs!" and cries of "Forwards! forwards!"

The king bent down his head, a sorrowful expression appeared in his face.

As soon as he reached his room, he sent for the general in command. He was with the troops, and an hour passed before he entered the king's apartment.

"Are the troops ready to march?" asked the king.

"No, your majesty! The army is done for, quite done for!" cried the general, striking his hand on his breast. "There are no provisions forthcoming, and the ammunition is scarcely sufficient for the first round."

"Then in your opinion, what is to be done?" asked the king, calmly and coldly.

"Your majesty!" cried Arentschildt, "the general staff is unanimous in declaring a capitulation to be unavoidable."

"Wherefore?" asked the king.

"The general staff is of opinion that the army cannot march," cried the general; "besides, overwhelming forces are drawing up on every side; from the north the outposts have sent in word that General Manteuffel is surrounding us; in the south General Vogel von Falckenstein has collected troops from Eisenach, and has cut off the road to Gotha."

"That would have been impossible had we marched on yesterday evening," said the king.

"An advance was impossible, as the general staff declared!" cried General von Arentschildt.

The king was silent.

"Your majesty!" cried the general, striking his breast; "it is hard for me to say the word--capitulate! but there is nothing else to be done. I beg your majesty's permission to commence arrangements with General von Falckenstein."

"I will send you my orders in an hour," said the king; "leave your adjutant here."

And he turned away.

The general left the room.

"It must be so!" cried the king sorrowfully. "The blood of all these brave men has flowed in vain. In vain has been all the pain, the anguish, and the toil--and why in vain? Because my eyes are dark; because I cannot lead my valiant troops as my forefathers have done, as the brave Brunswick--oh! it is hard, very hard!"

The king's face had a dark expression, he clenched his teeth, and raised his sightless eyes to heaven.

Then the anger vanished from his countenance, peace took its place, a sorrowful but gentle smile came to his lips. He folded his hands, and said in a low tone:

"My God and Saviour bore for me the crown of thorns; for me He shed His blood upon the cross. O Lord, not my will but Thine be done!"

He touched the golden bell which had been brought from his cabinet at Herrenhausen.

The groom of the chambers entered.

"I beg Count Platen, General Brandis, Count Ingelheim, with Herr Lex and Herr Meding, to come to me at once."

In a short time these gentlemen entered the room.

"You know the position in which we are placed, gentlemen," said the king; "we are surrounded by the enemy in superior numbers, and the general in command declares that the troops cannot march from exhaustion, that they are without either provisions or ammunition. He considers a capitulation unavoidable. Before I decide, I wish to hear your views. What do you think, Count Ingelheim?"

Gravely and with painful emotion, the Austrian ambassador replied: "It is most melancholy, your majesty, after such a day as yesterday to speak of capitulation; but if we are really surrounded by superior forces, brought up since yesterday evening," this he said with emphasis, "it would be a useless sacrifice of many brave soldiers to resist, and no one could thus advise your majesty."

"If we could only send to Berlin," said Count Platen, "it might yet----"

"Your majesty," interrupted General Brandis, in a trembling voice, "if it were possible that like the Duke of Brunswick you could draw your sword, and ride yourself at the head of your army, I would still cry 'Forwards!' I believe we should cut our way through; but as it is----" he stamped with his foot, and turned away to hide the tears that blinded his eyes.

The state-councillor Meding came close to the king.

"Your majesty," he said, in a husky voice, "the unavoidable must be endured; the sun shines even on the darkest day! Your majesty must not uselessly sacrifice the lives of your subjects, but," he continued, "you are answerable to history, and it must be clearly stated that a further

march is impossible. If I may presume to advise your majesty, cause the general in command, and each commander of a brigade, upon his military honour and the oath given to his sovereign, to declare before God and his conscience that the troops can neither march nor fight, and that they have neither food nor ammunition. Thus will your majesty be freed from all reproach from your army, your country, and history."

The king bent his head in approval.

"So shall it be," he said. "Draw up such a document with the assistance of Lex, and send it to General Arentschildt."

"And permit me, your majesty," cried Count Ingelheim, "at this solemn moment to express my conviction that notwithstanding the heavy trial it has pleased God to lay upon you, you will return in triumph to your capital, as surely as Austria and my emperor will, to the last man, maintain the rights of Germany."

The king held out his hand to him.

"You too have borne the fatigues of the campaign in vain," he said, with a melancholy smile.

"Not in vain, your majesty," cried Count Ingelheim. "I have seen a king and an army without fear and without reproach."

An hour later the king received the declaration he had demanded, signed by the general in command, the chief of the general staff, and all the brigadiers. A capitulation was concluded with General Vogel von Falckenstein, but soon afterwards General von Manteuffel arrived, and at the command of the King of Prussia granted other conditions, which were highly favourable to the Hanoverian army.

The officers retained their arms, their baggage, their horses, and all their privileges; and even the sub-officers retained their rank. The privates gave up their arms and horses to officers appointed by the King of Hanover, and they delivered them to Prussian commissioners; they were then dismissed to their homes.

But first General Manteuffel, at the express command of the King of Prussia, publicly acknowledged the brave conduct of the Hanoverian soldiers.

The King of Hanover sent Count Platen, General von Brandis, and Herr Meding before him to Linz, there to await him; he himself rested for a short time in the castle of the Duke of Altenburg, from whence he proceeded to Vienna to await further events.

The Hanoverian soldiers, who were smitten as by a thunderbolt from the seventh heaven by the capitulation, laid down their arms with bitter grief, and with dust on their heads returned to the homes they had left so confident of victory.

But they could return unhumiliated, for they had done what was possible. The brave and faithful army, on the last battle-field where the ancient banner of their country was unfurled, had raised a monument of honour and glory which the chivalrous commander of the Prussian troops was the first to adorn with the laurels of his praise.

But who, that knows the history of that day and its important results, can avoid asking the question, "Why was it not possible that two such noble, chivalrous, and pious princes, whose warriors stood opposed in deadly fight, should not have known and understood each other?"

CHAPTER XV.

SUSPENSE.

The sultry heat of summer was extremely oppressive in the plain surrounding the quiet village of Blechow; the sky looked dark and heavy, not that it was covered with clouds, but it was grey from the heavy atmosphere, and although the sun was still high above the horizon, his rays were of a dark blood-red colour. Deep stillness prevailed. Almost all the young men had left the village; as soon as the news came that the troops were concentrated at Göttingen they had set out to join the army there, or to overtake it on its march. But the stillness was the most complete in the old castle, where the president, with gloomy wrinkles on his brow, paced up and down the great hall, and gazed from time to time across the garden at the broad plain beyond. He had obeyed the king's command, that all magistrates should remain at their posts; he had, through the Landrostei, received a decree from the ministry whereby the government of the country was

delivered to the Prussian Civil Commissioner, Herr von Hardenburg, and he had given up all business to the Auditor von Bergfeld, saying, "Your knowledge is quite sufficient to enable you to understand and execute all the orders which may be issued by the government; do everything, and when you want my signature bring me the papers. I will remain at my post, and will sign them, since the king has so commanded; but do not consult me, for I will hear nothing of all this misery, and my old heart, which is sad enough already, shall not be pricked to death with pins. But if there is any oppression which I could by any possibility avert, then tell me the whole matter, and the Prussian Civil Commissioner shall hear old Wendenstein's voice as plainly as the Hanoverian board have ever heard it!" With that he left the office; he signed his name when needful, and he seldom opened his lips after the foreign occupation was completed.

Madame von Wendenstein went silently and quietly about the house,--she looked after the house keeping, and arranged everything as punctually as ever,--but sometimes the old lady would pause suddenly, her dreamy eyes fixed on the far-off distance, as if they sought to follow her thoughts beyond the wood-encircled horizon,--then she would hastily resume her occupation, and hurry restlessly through the well-known rooms, and the more she ordered and arranged the more she seemed to become mistress of her heavy trouble.

It was very quiet too in the Pfarrhaus. No one had left it, all went on as usual, but the general depression seemed to weigh down the humble roof, and even the roses in the garden hung their heads exhausted by the burning heat of the sun.

The pastor had gone out, as was his custom, to visit some of his people, for he did not consider the Sunday services his only duty, but thought that he who would really be a shepherd and bishop of souls must carry the word of God in friendly converse into the daily life of his flock and know its joys and sorrows.

Helena sat at the window, and mechanically plied her needle, but her eyes were often thoughtfully turned to the far distance, and her hands sank wearily into her lap.

Candidate Behrmann sat opposite to her; he was as neatly dressed and as smoothly brushed as ever, and his expressionless and composed countenance looked happier and more cheerful than usual.

His sharp observing eyes followed the looks the young girl fixed on the distant horizon, and that the languishing conversation might not entirely fail, he said,--

"It is strange what a sultry oppression hangs over all nature; we feel the actual weight of this thick heavy atmosphere."

"Our poor soldiers---what they must suffer from marching in this heat!" cried Helena, sighing.

"In those days I feel how doubly happy I am," said the candidate, "when I think of my peaceful and spiritual calling, and contrast it with the useless and really reprehensible employment of the soldiers, and all they must now undergo."

"Useless and reprehensible!" cried Helena, gazing at him with her great eyes; "do you call it useless to fight for your king and your country?"

"Not according to the views of the world," he said sanctimoniously; "all these people are doing their duty according to their lights; but the king himself is reprehensible, and the sacrifices they make for him are useless, for what will they gain? Oh! it is a nobler fight, and more pleasing to God, to struggle with spiritual weapons against sin and unbelief, and to benefit mankind--as your father does, Helena," he added, "and as I hope to emulate him in doing."

"Certainly it is a nobler calling, beautiful and holy, but a soldier also serves God when he fights on the side of right," said the young girl warmly.

"Which side is right?" asked the candidate; "both sides call on the God of battles, and very often what is evidently the wrong side conquers."

"For a soldier," cried Helena, "that side is the right which his duty and the oath plighted to his sovereign calls upon him to defend."

"Certainly, certainly," said the candidate, as if agreeing with her; "but women should feel greater interest in peaceful and beneficial usefulness,--what help, for instance, can a soldier be to his wife and children? at any moment he may be called away to do battle for the great ones of the earth,--he gives his life for a cause for which he does not care, and his family are left in need and misery."

"And they bear in their hearts the proud consciousness that he for whom they weep is worthy to be called a hero," cried Helena with kindling eyes.

The candidate gave his cousin a reproving look, and said, in a solemn voice,--

"I believe the conflict in God's service has also its heroes."

"Certainly," said Helena, without embarrassment; "every calling has its own round of duty to

fulfil, and we," she added with a smile, "are here to comfort and to help those who are wounded in the battle of life."

And again she dreamily turned her eyes to the distance. After a moment she rose hastily.

"I think," she said, "the heat will be less oppressive out of doors. I will walk to meet my father; he must now be returning." As she put on her straw hat she asked, "Will you come with me, cousin?"

"With the greatest pleasure," he replied eagerly; and they left the parsonage together, taking the road which led to the village.

"I have so greatly enjoyed my life here," said the candidate, after they had walked for a short time in silence, "that I already quite understand the charm of this quiet, peaceful seclusion, and I own myself ready to forego all larger circles of society."

"You see," said Helena merrily, "a short time ago you shuddered at our solitude, as I did at the restless, crowded city. At a time like this," she added, with a sigh, "it is hard to be so completely cut off from the world; we literally hear nothing--what has happened to the army and the king?" she said with energy. "Our poor sovereign!"

The candidate was silent.

"Really," he said, after a short pause, continuing his own flow of thought, as if he had not heard his cousin's last words, "really one. cannot feel solitary here. Your father's conversation, so simple, yet so rich in thoughts, offers greater variety than many an assembly in the great world; and your society, dear Helena," he added warmly.

She looked at him with astonishment. "My society," she interrupted, with a smile, "cannot compensate for your friends in town; my learning----"

"Your learning!" he exclaimed hastily; "is it learning that charms us in a woman?"

"A certain amount must be needful," said she, half jokingly, "when conversing with a learned man."

"Not for me," he cried. "Natural simplicity of heart and intellect has a charm for me. A man wishes to form, to educate his wife, not to find her opinions already fixed," he cried, his voice assuming a sudden tenderness of expression.

Her eyes were raised to his for a moment, and then lowered. They walked on for a time in silence.

"Helena," he said, "it is true that the idea of quiet, simple usefulness in the country attracts me more and more; and it is also true that your society has greatly influenced me."

She walked on in silence.

"When a man relinquishes the intellectual pleasures of the great world," he added, "he naturally seeks some equivalent; and this equivalent I find in my family, my home. I shall remain here to assist your father in his spiritual office. I shall experience double happiness in my labours, if my own heart finds a lovely flower to reward my unassuming industry. Helena," he continued, with animation, "shall you find no satisfaction in uniting with me to support and cheer the evening of your father's life, and in assisting me in my holy calling? Will you not stand at my side as a help-mate, such as your mother was to your father?"

The young girl walked on, her eyes fixed on the ground. A deep sigh heaved her breast.

"Cousin----"

"It does not become me, a servant of the Church," he interrupted, "to speak to you in the manner and the tone in which a man of the world might declare his love; pure and bright must be the flame which holds a place in the heart of a minister. But such a flame my heart offers you, Helena; and I ask you, plainly and candidly, will you accept what my heart can give, and do you believe you can thus find the quiet happiness of your life?"

She stood still, and looked at him calmly and honestly.

"Your words surprise me, cousin. I did not expect to hear this, and so suddenly----"

"The relations between us must be made clear," he said. "For this reason I have told you the feelings of my heart. A minister cannot woo as a man of the world; you cannot be surprised at that, being yourself the daughter of a minister."

"But consider," she said hesitatingly, "we scarcely know each other."

"Have you no confidence in me?" he asked. "Could you not accept me as your support through life?"

She looked on the ground. A deep blush spread over her face.

"But one must also----"

"Well, what?" he asked, and with piercing glance he gazed at her anxiously.

"Love," she whispered.

"And that you believe you could not feel for me?" he enquired.

Again she looked up at him. Again she sighed deeply, and her eyes were for a moment turned dreamily to the distance. Then a slight, half roguish smile came to her lips, and she whispered,--

"One cannot tell beforehand!"

"Beforehand?" he said, and a darker expression passed over his face.

"Cousin," she said, with sweetness and candour, as she held out her hand to him, "your words mean well, and it is flattering to me that you should think I can be anything to your life. Let me then tell you honestly, I think you are mistaken. Perhaps," she added kindly, "it is not needful to pursue this conversation, that has so surprised me, just now. Give me time. I promise to think of what you have said; and when we know each other better, I will tell you."

He looked down gloomily.

"Oh," he said bitterly, "your heart answers already; it does not respond to the simple language of my feelings. I truly do not know how to raise excitement and restless emotion. The servant of the Church cannot hope to cause the fiery passion that a--young officer----"

She stood still. Her face was very pale, and her eyes were fixed upon him with a proud look.

He stopped suddenly, as if displeased with himself, and his excited features resumed their usual smooth and calm expression.

"Cousin," she said coldly, "I must beg you not to continue this conversation now. Examine your own feelings, and give me time. My father----"

"Your father's wishes are my own," he said.

She bent her head, and a melancholy look passed over her face.

"My father," she then said, "cannot wish me to make any promise without examining my own heart."

"And you will tell me your decision, when you have made this examination?"

"Yes," said she. "Now leave me, I beg."

A deep breath passed through his thin lips; he cast his eyes to the ground, and walked by her silently and gravely.

"Here comes my father," cried Helena, and hastened to meet the pastor, who was returning by a side road leading to some of the scattered cottages of the village.

The candidate followed in silence.

"This is well," said the old gentlemen, "my children, that you come together to meet me; it is better in these troubled times not to be alone. Throughout the village there is sorrow and anxiety about the absent, the more so that a rumour is flying through the country of a most exciting nature."

"What is the rumour, papa?" cried Helena; "nothing disastrous?"

"Glorious, yet disastrous," said the pastor; "there has been a great battle, so it is said from village to village, from house to house. Our army has won a great victory; but much, much blood has been shed."

"Oh, how horrible!" cried Helena, with great emotion, as she folded her hands. The candidate's quick eyes regarded her with curiosity; but she did not remark it, her looks were fixed on space.

"People scarcely know which they feel," continued the pastor quietly, "joy at the victory, or anxiety lost sons and brothers should have fallen."

"How happy are those," said the candidate, "who have no relative in the army; then there is no anxiety, no care."

"You have not, like myself, lived here for years," replied the pastor gravely. "Every member of my flock is as dear to me as if he were my relation. I feel each grief that affects them as if I myself were smitten."

Helena involuntarily caught her father's hand with a hasty movement, and pressed it to her lips. The old gentleman felt a tear upon his hand. With a gentle smile, he said,--

"You too, my good child, feel for the sorrows of our friends. I know it must be so; you have grown up amongst them."

Helena covered her face for a moment with her handkerchief and sobbed.

The candidate flashed an evil, malicious side glance upon her, whilst a cold, scornful smile played around his lips.

"I am going to the president," said the pastor; "there they must have the earliest reliable news, and they will be most anxious about the lieutenant. Poor Madame von Wendenstein! Come with me to the castle, children."

And they took the road to the hill upon which the old house stood amidst high dark woods.

Helena took her father's arm, and involuntarily hastened her steps.

They climbed the hill and entered the hall by the open door. The great oak chests stood there as still and solemn as ever, and the old paintings looked down from their frames as gravely and quietly as if there were no changes, no cares nor sorrows in the world of living men.

In the large garden drawing-room Herr von Wendenstein paced up and down with measured step, Madame von Wendenstein sat in her accustomed place before the large round table, and her daughters were beside her; all was as usual, yet a heavy cloud of care weighed on each brow, on each heart.

The president held out his hand to the pastor in silence, silently Madame von Wendenstein greeted her visitors, and the young girls embraced without speaking a word.

"A rumour is abroad of a great battle, and of a great victory," said the pastor; "I hoped here to learn something reliable."

"I have had no news," said the president gloomily. "I only know what has been brought from mouth to mouth; some part will be true; let us hope the news of the victory may be confirmed."

He said nothing of the care and anxiety of his heart for the son who was on the distant battle-field, but an affectionate and sympathizing look flew from beneath his contracted brows towards his wife.

"What a wonderful thing the world is!" she said in a low tone, as she shook her head. "In peaceful times, steam and the telegraph seemed to have annihilated time and space, and news of the most unimportant trifles flew from one end of the earth to the other; and now, when so many hearts are tormented by restless anxiety, news travels slowly and uncertainly from mouth to mouth, as in the days that are long passed away."

"So it is with the proud achievements of human intellect," said the pastor; "when the hand of God seizes the history of a nation, man grows weak and powerless, and all the progress the world has made becomes as nothing. But that it is God's hand must be our consolation, He has power to raise up and to protect, He has power to heal the wounds His hands have made."

With a pious look of resignation, Madame von Wendenstein listened to the pastor's words, but tears trickled down her cheeks, and proved how hard her heart found this anxious suspense.

"I have no news from the army," said the president, "but I have received a letter from my son in Hanover. He tells me of the Prussian government, and praises its order and punctuality highly," said the old gentleman with some bitterness.

"Public men must be in great and painful difficulties in Hanover," said the pastor; "there, political views are much more in the foreground than here in the country, and it must be extremely hard to reconcile the duties of a servant of Hanover with the necessities of the situation."

"It appears as if the gentlemen in office found them easy to reconcile," said the president gloomily. "It is certainly good that the Prussian government should be excellent, prompt, and punctual, but it would never come into my head in these days to feel any particular enthusiasm about it. Well, youth is different to what it was in my day."

The auditor Bergfeld entered the room with a hasty step and an excited look.

"What news do you bring from Lüchow?" cried the president, hastening towards him: and all eyes were fixed on him in mute anxiety.

"It is true!" he cried; "there has been a battle--at Langensalza, and our army is victorious!"

"Thank God!" cried the president; "and have they succeeded in pressing on to the south?"

"Alas, no," said Bergfeld, mournfully, "the day after the battle our brave soldiers were surrounded by overwhelming forces and obliged to capitulate." The president gazed gloomily before him. "Is the king a prisoner?" he asked. "No," said Bergfeld, "the king is free, the capitulation is very honourable, the officers return home with their arms and horses. But," he continued, "there are many wounded; in Hanover committees have been formed, nourishment is wanted, they beg for linen, for bread and meat."

"Everything in the house shall be packed up at once," cried the president, energetically, "the wounded must have the best of everything; my cellar shall be emptied."

Madame von Wendenstein had risen and approached her husband.

"Let me take the things," she said, imploringly. "Why?" cried the president, "you can do no good, and if Karl comes back, it--"

"*If* he comes back!" cried the old lady, bursting into tears.

"We shall soon hear news of him," said the president, "and until then--"

The sound of voices was heard in the hall. Johann entered and said, "Old Deyke is here; he wishes to speak to the president."

"Bring him in, bring him in!" cried the old gentleman, and the old peasant Deyke came in amongst the excited group, looking as calm and dignified as usual, but with a deep and gloomy gravity spread over his sharp features.

"Well, dear Deyke," cried the president, "have you heard the news; do you come to consult with us how to send in the quickest way all that our brave soldiers need?"

"I have received a letter from my Fritz," said the peasant solemnly, whilst he respectfully took the hand held out to him by the president.

"Well, and how does the brave young fellow get on? cried the old gentleman.

"Has he seen my son?" asked Madame von Wendenstein, gazing at the peasant with anxious eyes.

"He has found the lieutenant," he replied, laconically.

"And my son lives?" cried the poor lady with hesitation. She feared to hear the answer which must touch the inmost string of her heart.

"He lives," said old Deyke. "I wish to say a couple of words to the president alone," he stammered.

"No!" cried Madame von Wendenstein, vehemently, "no, not alone. Deyke, you have some bad news, but I will hear it; I am strong enough to hear anything, but I cannot bear suspense. I beg you," she continued, looking affectionately at her husband, "to let me hear what he has to tell."

The president looked undecided. The pastor came forward slowly.

"Permit your wife to hear the tidings, whatever they may be, my old friend," he said, gravely and quietly. "Your son lives, that is the first and most important point; whatever may be to come, cannot be too hard for a true and pious heart, like our friend's, to bear."

Madame von Wendenstein looked gratefully at the clergyman.

Old Deyke slowly drew out a paper.

"The president will perhaps look at my son's letter?"

"Give it to me," said the pastor; "it belongs to God's servant, an old friend of this house, to impart this message."

He took the paper and walked to the window, through which the last light of the waning day entered the room.

Madame von Wendenstein with widely opened eyes hung on his lips. Helena sat at the table with her head resting on her hand, calm and apparently indifferent; her eyes were cast down; it seemed doubtful whether she saw or heard anything passing around her.

Slowly the pastor read,--

"My dear Father,

"I write at once that you may have news of me, and, thank God, I am well and cheerful; I fell in with the army at Langensalza, and enlisted in the cuirassier guards, and took part in the great

battle, and went under a hot fire, but I came out safe and sound. We were victorious, and took two cannon and many prisoners, but to-day we are surrounded by superior numbers, and the generals have said we could not march. So the king capitulated, and we are all coming home. My heart is almost broken when I look at all our brave soldiers going back with the white staff in their hands, and they don't look such cowardly creatures either.

"Now, dear father, I must tell you of Lieutenant von Wendenstein, with whom I must remain, for he is badly wounded, and I cannot leave him here alone. I found him on the battle-field and thought he was dead, but, thank God, it was not so bad as that; and the doctor has extracted the ball, and says he will live if he only has strength to hold out through the fever. I am with him at the brewer Lohmeier's, a good man though he is a Prussian, and the lieutenant is well cared for. My host sends off this letter for me through an acquaintance in the field post. Go at once to the president and tell him all, and have no anxiety about me for I am all right.

"Your son,

"Fritz.

"Written the 28th July, 1866."

The pastor was silent.

The president came up to his wife, put his arm round her shoulders, kissed her grey hair, and said,--

"He lives! my God, I thank thee!"

"And now I may go to him?" asked Madame von Wendenstein.

"And I?" cried her daughter.

"Yes," said the old gentleman, "and I wish I could go with you, but I should be of no use there."

Helena rose; she walked slowly but with a firm step towards Madame von Wendenstein and said, while her eyes shone brilliantly,--

"May I accompany you? If my father will permit it?"

"You, Helena?" cried the pastor.

"Our brave soldiers want nursing," said the young girl, looking firmly at her father, "and you have taught me to help the suffering. Will you not allow me at such a time as this to do my duty?"

The pastor looked kindly at his daughter. "Go, my child, and God be with you;" and turning to Madame von Wendenstein, he added, "Will you take my daughter under your protection?"

"With all my heart," cried the old lady, and folded the pastor's daughter in her arms.

Candidate Behrmann had watched the whole of this scene in silence.

He bit his lips, when Helena announced her intention of accompanying Madame von Wendenstein, and a pale ray shot from his eyes, but his face immediately resumed its smooth smiling expression, he stepped forward and said in a gentle voice,--

"I shall also beg permission, madame, to accompany you on your journey; it will be desirable for you to have a male protector, and I think on the site of the bloody battle-field spiritual consolation will be needed and welcomed. I believe I can be more useful there than here, where until I return my uncle can so well fulfil all the duties of his sacred office alone."

He looked humbly and modestly at his uncle and the president, awaiting their reply.

"That is a good and right thought, my dear nephew," said the pastor, holding out his hand to him; "on yonder battle-field there is grave and blessed work to be done, and I can get on here in the meantime quite well alone."

The president was glad that the ladies should have a protector, and Madame von Wendenstein thanked the candidate heartily for facilitating her journey to her suffering son.

Helena had looked up, startled for a moment when her cousin said he would accompany the ladies; then in silence, with downcast eyes, she listened to the rest of the conversation, neither word nor look betraying the least interest in it.

The greatest movement and activity suddenly began in the old castle.

Madame von Wendenstein hastened through the well-known rooms ordering and arranging, here showing her daughters what must be packed in the travelling trunks, there sorting out wine, sugar, and nourishment of all kinds, then again giving the servants instructions as to what they

were to do in her absence: all the silent abstraction which had altered the old lady during the last few days had vanished, with active step and shining eyes she hurried about, and anyone so seeing her might have thought she was preparing for some great festival.

Helena had returned to the Pfarrhaus with her father and the candidate to make her rapid preparations for the journey, and not quite two hours after the journey had been decided on the president's comfortable carriage, with its well-bred powerful horses, stood before the large hall door of the castle.

Madame von Wendenstein gave her husband a long and affectionate embrace, it was the first time for years that they had been separated. He laid his hand on her head and said, "God bless you! and bring you back with our son!"

Old Deyke was there, and a crowd of villagers were there too, with their wives and daughters, for the news had spread like wild-fire that the president's wife and daughter were going to nurse the wounded lieutenant, and that the pastor's daughter and the new candidate were to accompany them. They all came to take leave, and Madame von Wendenstein shook hands with all, and promised each to gain news of this or that relative who was with the army. What the carriage could still hold was taken up with love offerings that all had brought for their relations, and every head was uncovered when at last the carriage rolled away; but there was no shouting, no loud word was heard, and they all went back quietly to their homes, in great anxiety as to what the next few days must bring, whether the life or death of those dear to them.

The president went quietly back into the castle with the pastor, and the two old gentlemen sat together for a long time. They said but little, and yet each found in these weary times consolation in the society of the other. The president cast his eyes round the drawing-room, which was as quiet and comfortable as ever, but when he looked at the place where his wife usually sat, and thought of the cheerful voices which used to sound through the room, and then turned his thoughts to the distant town where his son lay threatened by death, a mist came before his eyes, he pressed his eyelids together and a hot drop fell on his hand. He stood up quickly, and walked several times up and down the room.

The pastor arose.

"My honoured old friend," he said, "at such a moment as this a man like yourself need not be ashamed of a tear! It is late, let us go to rest, and these days will pass away!"

The president stood still, held out his hand to the pastor, and looked at him through the blinding tears which ran down his cheeks.

"Pray to God," he said in a low voice, "to give me back my son."

The pastor went home. All was quiet in the castle and the darkness of night brooded over it, but a light still burned in the president's window, and the servants heard, even until morning dawned, the firm regular step of their old master as he paced up and down in the lonely castle.

CHAPTER XVI.

INTRIGUE.

Whilst in North Germany the catastrophe so disastrous to the House of Guelph was completed, in Vienna everything was expected from the battle which all foresaw must take place in Bohemia almost immediately. The Austrian arms had been successful in Italy, that drill ground for the Austrian general staff officers, the battle of Custozza had been won, and new confidence filled the Viennese, as to their success in Germany.

The Viennese placed full confidence in Field-Marshal Benedek, the man of the people, and from him they expected, in their light-hearted, sanguine fashion, complete success. Those anxious doubts had vanished which a short time before had filled them with uneasiness; the arms of Austria were victorious in Italy, fortune was favourable to the empire, and with excited but joyful confidence they awaited news from Bohemia. A great victory was certainly expected.

Things were looked at differently, and not with such confidence in the state offices in the Ballhaus Platz, and in the Hofburg.

Count Mensdorff was sad and downcast; the Italian success had not removed his gloomy forebodings, and he could only reply with a feeble smile to the congratulations he received on the victory of Custozza. The emperor alternated between fear and joyful hope; the victory in Italy

awakened in his heart the proud recollection of Novara, and a wide and brilliant future spread before his gaze. But when the doubts, the warnings of Field-Marshal Benedek occurred to him--the plain, straightforward general, who troubled himself little about strategic operations, and only knew how to lead his soldiers against the enemy and to fight; but who continually maintained that with these troops, in the condition in which he found them, he could not beat the enemy--the emperor's heart had deep misgivings, and he waited for the future with great anxiety.

Whilst all Vienna felt the most restless, feverish excitement; whilst everyone wished that time had wings to hasten the events of the future, Madame Antonia Balzer lay on her luxurious couch in her quiet boudoir. The curtains were closed, notwithstanding the great heat; a soft twilight prevailed, and a mysterious and varied perfume pervaded the room, that perfume which fills the immediate neighbourhood of an elegant and beautiful woman; one cannot tell of what it consists, but it gives the invisible air a magnetic, sympathetic charm.

The young lady lay there as if she courted sleep, and on her features neither the passionate *abandon* appeared with which she had welcomed Herr von Stielow, nor the icy coldness which she had shown to her husband.

Her large eyes gazed gloomily into space, and her face expressed anxious, mournful weariness.

A number of sealed letters and telegrams lay on a small table near her.

Her pearly hand played carelessly with a small poodle dog which lay curled up in her lap.

"I thought I was strong," she whispered to herself; "and yet I cannot forget him!"

She sprang up, placed the little dog upon the pillow, and walked slowly up and down the room.

"What a wonderful organization is our human nature!" she cried scornfully. "I thought I was strong. I had set it before me as a means to rule, to rise on the aspiring ladder of life, without permitting myself to be kept back by the emotions and motives of the common herd; and now, when my feet touch the very first step of the ladder I look back, my heart weeps; I am sick with love and regret, like any milliner's girl," she added, with an angry look, as she stamped her small foot upon the carpet.

She gazed before her.

"And why," she asked thoughtfully, "why cannot my heart forget one who so scornfully turned from me, who so contemptuously gave me up? This Count Rivero--he offers me what I long for; he is a man who occupies a high place in the world, and guides with powerful hand the threads that weave the fate of men; why do I not love him? I might be happy. And he," she continued, while a soft mist came over her eyes, and her arms were slightly raised, "he, for whom every pulse in my heart beats, he whom I call back in the still hours of the night, whom my arms seek in empty space, who is he? A boy,--in intellect far beneath me; yet oh! he is so beautiful, so pure!" she cried, stretching out her hands to the picture her mind had called up; "I love him, and I am the slave of my love!"

She sank wearily into a luxurious chair, and covered her face with her hands.

She sat for a long time motionless, and only the panting breath of her heaving bosom interrupted the silence of the darkened room.

Then again she sprang up, and with trembling lips and vehement voice she cried,--

"But she--who tore him from me--that fine lady, who from her cradle has enjoyed every happiness life can afford, who basks in the golden sunshine of an admiring world, who has all--all, that is denied me--shall she enjoy the love that I have lost?"

She hastily opened a small casket of incrusted ebony, and took out a photograph in the form of a *carte-de-visite*.

She regarded it long with glowing looks.

"What foolish, inexpressive features!" she cried; "how lukewarm, how wearisome must be her love. Can she make him happy--he, who has known the passion of my heart--who has learnt what love is?"

And she spasmodically seized the likeness and crushed it together.

The bell of the entrance hall aroused her from her stormy dreams; she threw the crumpled photograph hastily back into the casket, and her face resumed its usual calm expression.

The servant announced Count Rivero, who immediately entered, faultlessly elegant as ever, cold, calm, and friendly; the smile of the man of the world upon his lips.

With light elastic steps he approached the lady and pressed his lips lightly on her hand--not with the fiery warmth of a lover--still less with the respectful courtesy of a man of distinction

towards a lady of the great world. In the count's greeting there was a certain negligent familiarity, which only his extreme elegance, and the courteous bearing which marked his every movement preserved from rudeness.

She seemed to feel this, and regarded her visitor coldly, almost with enmity.

"What? have you slept, my fair friend?" said the count, smiling: "truly it is hard to believe that the whole world is trembling with anxiety when one enters this darkened and quiet apartment."

"A number of letters and despatches have arrived!" she said, pointing to the small table near her couch.

"Are you sure," asked the count, "that this large correspondence does not arouse curiosity?"

She smiled coldly.

"They are accustomed to my receiving many letters, and I do not think they will seek here for the clue of important political events."

The count walked to the window, and drew back one of the curtains, admitting the bright light into the room. He then pushed the table with the letters to the window, and opened them one after another, whilst the young lady watched him from her easy-chair in silence.

The count drew a portfolio from his pocket, took out a small volume containing various ciphers, and with its help began to decipher the letters. The contents appeared in the highest degree satisfactory, for an expression of joy beamed from his face, and he rose with a proud look when he had ended the perusal.

"I see the work approaches its completion," he said, half to himself, half to Madame Balzer; "soon will the building of lies and wickedness fall in ruins, and truth and right will again triumph."

"And what will it be to me?" asked the young lady, slightly turning her head towards the count.

He came up to her, seated himself near her couch, and spoke with extreme courtesy, as he kissed the hand she negligently abandoned to him.

"You have assisted in a great and noble work, my lovely friend, and you have rendered very important assistance by taking charge of a secret correspondence, which has enabled me to preserve the appearance of a man of the world and ordinary traveller. I promise you an independent and brilliant position. The *how* you must leave to me. I hope you trust my words."

She gave him a quick look and said,--

"I do not doubt that you can keep your promise, or that you will keep it."

"But," he continued, "much remains still to be done, and I believe I can open out greater and nobler spheres to your genius and industry: will you continue to be my confederate?"

"I will," she replied; then a deep sigh heaved her breast, a rapid blush tinged her cheeks, and whilst a trembling fire sparkled in her eyes she said, "I have one wish."

"Express it!" he said with the gallantry of a man of the world; "if it be in my power to fulfil it--"

"I believe it is, for I have seen so many proofs of your power that I have unbounded confidence in it."

"Well?" he asked, gazing at her enquiringly.

She cast down her eyes, interlaced her fingers, and said in a low and timid voice,--

"Give me back Stielow."

Immense surprise, and a shade of displeasure appeared on his face.

"I certainly did not expect this wish," he said, "I thought you had forgotten this caprice. To fulfil it exceeds my power."

"I do not believe it," she replied, raising her eyes and gazing full at the count, "he is a boy, and you know how to lead earnest men of ripe years."

"But you forget," said he, "that--"

"That he, in a fit of ill-temper, out of spite, has thrown himself at the feet of a *fade*, insipid girl, who finds a place in the almanach de Gotha, where her heart is also," she cried, rising hastily from her recumbent position, with flashing eyes. "No, I do not forget it, but just for that reason I will have him back. I will help you in everything," she continued, speaking more slowly, "I will employ all the powers of my intellect and of my will, on behalf of your plans; but I will have something in return for myself, and I say therefore, 'Give me back Stielow.'"

"You shall certainly," said the count, "have for yourself whatever you wish. I impose no restraints on your little personal divertissements," he added, with a smile; "but what do you want with this boy--as you yourself call him?--can you not rule men with your genius, and by a glance from those eyes?"

"I love him!" she whispered.

The count looked at her with amazement.

"Forgive me!" he said, smiling, "this boy--"

"Because he is a boy," she cried, and a stream of passionate feeling gushed from her large widely-opened eyes,--"because he is so pure, so good, and so beautiful," she whispered, and her eyes were veiled with mist.

The count looked at her very gravely.

"Do you know," he said, "that the love which rules you will take from you the power of ruling others, and of being my ally?"

"No," she cried, "no, it will strengthen me; but the vain longing in my heart makes me gloomy and weak,--oh! give him back to me again. I own my weakness, let me in this one point be weak, and I promise in every other you shall find me strong and immovable."

"Had you told me before what you now tell me," said he thoughtfully, "it might have been possible, perhaps, but now it is out of my power, and--I may not use it; this young man shall not be the plaything of your caprice," he said gravely and decidedly, "shake off this weakness, be strong, and forget this fancy!"

She rose cold and calm.

"Let us speak of it no more," she said in her accustomed tone.

The count examined her attentively.

"You own I am right?" he asked.

"I will forget this fancy," she replied without a muscle of her face changing.

At this moment the door-bell was heard.

"It is Galotti," said the count, and opened the door of the boudoir.

A strongly-made man entered, of middle height with a full face. His thin hair left a lofty arched brow completely free, the bright eyes were quick and observing, and the full lips denoted an energetic temperament and brilliant eloquence.

"Things are going on excellently," cried the count, advancing to meet him. "Everything is prepared for the decisive blow. The Sardinian party have lost courage; they are disorganized by the Austrian victory, and with one stroke the contemptible government they call Italian will crumble to pieces."

"Glorious! glorious!" cried Galotti, as he pressed Count Rivero's hand, and approached the lady, whom he greeted with all the grace of one accustomed to good society. "I bring good news too," he said, "they are ready at the Farnese Palace, and Count Montebello has, in answer to a confidential enquiry, made it clearly understood that he will take no steps to prevent Italy from becoming what was intended at the peace of Zurich."

"I will leave you, gentlemen," said Madame Balzer. "I will have breakfast prepared in the dining-room, and shall be at your disposal when your interview is ended."

Count Rivero kissed her hand, Signer Galotti bowed, and she withdrew through the door leading to her sleeping apartment.

"The king will go to Naples?" asked the count as soon as she had left the room.

"At the very first sign from us," replied Galotti, "a troop of brigands, formed of old soldiers of the Neapolitan guards, will await him on the coast, the Sardinian garrisons are always weak, and at the first signal the whole people will rise!"

"Do you think the moment has come for placing the match to our well-laid train?" asked the count.

"Certainly," replied Galotti; "what should we wait for? The Sardinian army is completely demoralized by the battle of Custozza, and is held in check by the Grand Duke Albert, so that it cannot be employed in the interior. The most rapid action is needful; in a few weeks Italy can be freed from the heavy yoke which weighs her down. Everyone is waiting longingly for the word, the giving of which is in your hand."

The count walked thoughtfully to the window.

"Everything has been prepared so long, thought over so carefully," said he, "and yet now the decisive moment approaches, now the eventful word--'Act!'--must be spoken, giving life and motion to our quiet preparations,--the doubt arises whether all is well organized. Yet we can no longer hesitate. We must send the watchword to Rome and Naples, and to Tuscany," he said, turning to Galotti; "here are three addresses," he added, taking from his portfolio three cards and carefully perusing them. "The text of the telegram is written below, the names, like the contents of the despatches, are perfectly unimportant, they will disclose nothing."

And with a trembling hand he held out the cards to Signor Galotti.

Madame Balzer rushed into the boudoir.

"Do you know, Count Rivero," she cried, "that the army in Bohemia is completely defeated? The news is spreading like wild-fire through Vienna, my maid has just heard it in the house."

The count gazed at her in blank dismay. His eyes opened wide with horror, a nervous movement convulsed his lips, and he hastily snatched up his hat.

"Impossible!" cried Galotti. "General Gablenz has been victorious in several skirmishes; a great battle was not expected."

"We must hear what has happened," said the count, in a low voice, "it would be horrible if this intelligence were true."

He was about to hasten away. A violent peal at the bell was heard, and almost immediately a young man in the dress of a priest entered the room.

"Thank God! that I find you here, Count Rivero," he cried, "nothing must be done, the disaster is immense, Benedek is totally beaten, the whole army is in wild flight and confusion."

The count was dumb. His dark eyes were raised to heaven with a burning look, deep grief was painted on his features.

"We must act so much the more rapidly and energetically," cried Galotti; "if this news reaches Italy our confederates will be frightened and confused, the enemy will gain courage, and the lukewarm will become foes."

He stretched out his hand to take the cards which Rivero still held.

The count made a movement of refusal.

"How did you gain your information, Abbé Rosti?" he asked quietly.

"It has just been brought from the Hofburg to the Nuncio," replied the abbé. "Unhappily there is no doubt of its truth."

"Then the work of years is lost!" said Count Rivero, in a grave and melancholy voice.

"Let us use the present moment!" cried Galotti, "let us act quickly; then, let what will happen in Germany, we shall at least have restored Italy to her ancient rights, and Austria must be grateful to us if we give her in Italy the influence she has lost in Germany."

"No!" said the count, calmly, "we must not venture upon action before the situation is perfectly plain. Our whole force in Italy is quite strong enough to break the Piedmontese rule if the regular army is engaged and defeated by the victorious Austrian troops, but we are not in a position to effect anything against the army of Piedmont if it is free to act against us. We should uselessly sacrifice all our faithful friends, and we should destroy the organization we have formed with such toil, which will be useful to us in the future, and which we could never again bring to such perfection if it were now broken up. And I fear Victor Emanuel's army will be free, I fear Vienna will give up Italy."

"Give up Italy, after the victory of Custozza!" cried the Abbé Rosti, "it is impossible,--wherefore?"

"For Germany! which she will also lose!"

"But, my God!" cried Galotti, "that would have been done before the campaign, if done at all. Austria's forces in Germany would have been doubled--but now--"

"My dear friend," said the count, sighing, "remember the words of the First Napoleon: 'Austria is always too late--by one year, one army, and one idea!'"

"I cannot make up my mind to sit still," cried Galotti, energetically, "now that everything is prepared, and we seem almost to hold success in our hands."

"I do not desire that we should indifferently sit still," said Count Rivero; "we will never sit

still," he added, with flashing eyes, "but we must perhaps begin again a long and toilsome work from the beginning. For the present we must not act hastily, and compromise individuals and events, risking the future before we see our way clearly. Do you know," he enquired of the abbé, "how the emperor received the intelligence and what he did?"

"The emperor was much cast down, as was natural," said the abbé; "he sent Count Mensdorff immediately to the army, that he might ascertain its condition. That is all we have yet heard."

"Mensdorff was right," said Count Rivero, thoughtfully; then, raising himself with an energetic movement, he said: "Once more, gentlemen, we must see clearly before we act; and our courage must not fail, even if we perceive long years of toil before us. Above all, I wish to be fully informed as to the present, then we will speak of the future."

He approached the lady, who had remained during the conversation gazing before her as if completely indifferent, and said, as he kissed her hand: "Auf Wiedersehn! chère amie!" then he added in a somewhat lower voice, "Perhaps the moment will soon come for opening so wide a field to your skilful industry, that all minor wishes will be forgotten!"

She looked up at him quickly for a moment, but she did not reply.

The two other gentlemen took leave, and left the room with the count.

The young lady remained alone.

A flashing look followed them as they withdrew.

"You wish to use me for your plans," she cried, "you seek to charm me with hopes of freedom and dominion, and you would prepare for me a gilded slavery? You forbid my heart to beat, because it cannot be so serviceable as your tool? Ah! you deceive yourself, Count Rivero! I need you, but I am not your servant, your slave! Well then, let war begin between us," she said, with determination; "not war to the death, but a war for rule; I will try to make your proud shoulders bear me up to power and independence. Independence!" said she, sighing, after a short silence, "how much I am short of it, yet let me go carefully and prudently onwards; first, I will see whether I cannot win back the unfaithful friend to whom my heart still clings, without the aid of my master."

She threw herself on the sofa, and looked thoughtfully before her.

"But, my God!" she cried, with anguish in her eyes, as she pressed her tender hand to her forehead, "I wish to win him back, and he is before the enemy, the great battle has been fought, perhaps he lies dead already upon the bloody field." And her eyes gazed into space as if she actually saw the horrible picture her fancy had painted.

Then she leant back and a dark expression passed over her face.

"And if it were so?" she said, gloomily, "perhaps it would be better for me, and I might then be free from the burning thorn I cannot tear from my heart. The count is right! such love is weakness, and I will not be weak! perhaps I should again be strong. But to know that he is living, to think that he belongs to me no longer, that he, in his beauty, is at the feet of another--"

She sprang up, a wild glow kindled in her eyes, her breast heaved high, her beautiful features were distorted by the vehemence of her emotion.

"Never, never!" she said, in a low, hissing voice. "If he were dead, I could forget him; but that picture will pursue me everywhere--will poison my life. Poison!" she repeated, and an evil flash passed across her face. "How easy it was in days gone by," she whispered, "to destroy an enemy! Now--" Again she stared blankly before her. "But is it needful to poison the body to conquer difficulties?"

A wicked smile played around her beautiful mouth; her eyes flashed, and for a long time she sat thinking deeply.

She rose and went to her rosewood writing-table. She took a packet of letters from one compartment and began to read them attentively. Several she threw back; at last she seemed to have found what she sought. It was a short note only, written on a single sheet.

"He wrote me this during the manœ uvres," said she; "this will serve me."

She read:--

"My sweet queen,

"I must tell you in a few words how my heart longs for you, and how much I feel this separation. All day I am interested, and hard at work at my duty, but when at night I lie down in bivouac, the stars above me, and the soft breath of night sighing around, then your sweet image dwells in my heart; I seem to feel your breath; I open my arms seeking to embrace you; and when

at last sleep weighs down my eyelids, you are with me in my dreams. Oh, that the unmelodious trumpet must destroy such heavenly visions! I would ever dream until I am again with you, and find with you a sweeter reality. I kiss this paper, so soon to touch your lovely hands."

While she read her voice was soft, and she gazed at the letter lost in recollections.

Then again her features grew cold and hard.

"This will do perfectly," said she; "and no date; excellent!"

She seized a pen, and after considering the handwriting for a few moments, she wrote at the commencement of the letter--"June 30th, 1866."

She looked attentively at her writing.

"Yes," she said, "it will pass capitally."

She rang a small silver bell. Her maid entered.

"Find my husband," said Madame Balzer, "and tell him I wish to speak to him immediately."

The maid withdrew, and the young lady walked thoughtfully to the window, carelessly looking down on the excited crowds below, whilst a slight smile of satisfaction played on her lips.

CHAPTER XVII.

DEFEAT.

Gloomy silence prevailed in the Hofburg. In the midst of the rejoicings at the Italian victory the annihilating thunderbolt had fallen, ruining all hopes of success in Bohemia, and destroying in a moment the blind confidence that had been placed in Field-Marshal Benedek and his operations. It was as if a sudden stupefaction had come on everyone. The attendants glided slowly and sadly through the long corridors, and scarcely said the few words necessary for the fulfilment of their duties. Immediately after receiving the intelligence of the lost battle, the emperor had sent Count Mensdorff to Benedek's head-quarters, that, being himself a soldier, he might judge of the condition of affairs; he then withdrew into his own apartments, and only the adjutant-general had access to him.

Deep silence reigned in the imperial ante-room. The life guardsman stood quietly before the emperor's door; the equerry on duty, Baron Fejérváry de Komlos, leant silently against the window and looked at the groups below, as they formed and again dispersed after grave whispered converse. There were often looks cast upwards to the windows of the castle, as though they longed for fresh news--for something decided, to remove their load of anxiety.

The regular ticking of the great old clock was heard, marking as calmly these saddest moments to the House of Hapsburg as it had proclaimed during its greatest splendour that all yielded to the inexorable scythe of Time. For Time goes on with equal pace during the flying moments of happiness and during the creeping hours of the blackest day, only in the rush of happiness his iron footstep is unheard, whilst in the sad stillness of misfortune "*memento mori*" sounds on every ear, and calls to each one of us from the bosom of the solemn vanished past.

Thus was it here. The guardsman and the equerry had often performed their duty in this very room, with their hearts full of joyful thoughts of the world without; and all those hours had vanished from their recollection, or had melted together in a blurred picture; but these hours, these still, dark hours, with the slow stroke of the heavy pendulum marking their lingering seconds, were buried deep in their memory for ever.

The Adjutant-General Count Crenneville entered. He was accompanied by the Hanoverian ambassador, General von Knesebeck, dressed in the full uniform of a Hanoverian general, and followed by the King of Hanover's equerry, Major von Kohlrausch, a simple soldier-like man, with a short black moustache and a bald head.

General von Knesebeck, the tall, stately man who had moved with so firm and proud a step through Count Mensdorff's salons, now stooped in his walk. Sorrow and mourning lay on his grave regular features, and without speaking a word he saluted the equerry on duty.

"Will you announce me, dear baron?" said Count Crenneville to Baron von Fejérváry.

He entered the imperial apartment, and returning immediately, signified to the adjutant-general by a respectful movement that the emperor awaited him.

Count Crenneville entered the cabinet of Francis Joseph.

The emperor again wore a large grey military cloak. He sat bending over his writing-table; pens, papers, and letters lay untouched before him; there were no signs of the restless industry of a sovereign who never allowed an hour to pass idly. It was not grief which the excited, wearied countenance of the emperor wore, it was comfortless, dull despair.

Crenneville looked sadly at his sovereign thus weighed down with sorrow, and said, with deep emotion,--

"I beg your imperial majesty not to yield to the sad impression of this disastrous news. We all--all Austria looks to her emperor. No misfortune is so great that a strong will and a resolute courage cannot amend it; and if your majesty despairs, what will the army--what will the people do?"

The emperor slowly raised his wearied eyes and passed his hand over his brow as if to ease it of a load of thought.

"You are right," he answered mournfully. "Austria expects from me courage and decision, and truly," he cried, raising his head, whilst an angry flash darted from his eyes, "courage I have, might I but face the enemy's fire, and if my personal courage could procure success, victory should not fail the banners of Austria! But must I not believe that I am ordained to misfortune, that my sceptre must bring destruction upon Austria? Have I not done everything to procure success? have I not placed at the head of the troops a man whom the army and the nation considered the most competent? And now?--beaten!" cried he vehemently, with tears in his eyes, "beaten after so haughty, so bold an attack, beaten by this enemy who during the last century has seized on my ancestral inheritance in Germany, an enemy whom I hoped to overthrow for ever. What avails me the victory in Italy, if I lose Germany? oh! it is hard!"

And the emperor supported his head in both his hands whilst a deep sigh heaved his breast.

Count Crenneville came a step nearer.

"Your majesty!" said he, "all is not yet lost. Mensdorff will perhaps bring us good news; the battle must have cost the enemy much, perhaps all may still be well."

The emperor let his hands sink down and looked at the count for some time.

"My dear Crenneville!" he then said, gravely and slowly, "I will tell you something which has never been so clear to me as at this moment. Do you know," he said dreamily, "what great characteristic of my family carried Hapsburg and Austria through all the hardest times? It was its tenacity, its tough indestructible tenacity, that bent beneath the blows of misfortune, without for a moment losing sight of the aim for which to suffer, to wait, to conquer. Go to past history, look up the darkest, heaviest times, you will find in all my ancestors proofs of unconquerable endurance, and you will find too that this characteristic was their salvation. This tenacity," he continued after a short silence, "this Hapsburg endurance, in me is wanting, and that is my misfortune. Joy bears me on his light pinions high as the heavens, large views of life fill me with mighty inspiration, but even so the heavy hand of misfortune dashes me to the ground. I can fight, I can sacrifice myself, but I cannot bear, I cannot wait--oh! I cannot wait!" he cried, with a look of horror.

Then suddenly he raised his head, he pressed his beautiful teeth lightly on the full under lip and said, the princely pride of the Hapsburg kindling in his eyes,--

"You are right, Count Crenneville, I must not yield to weakness; forget that you have seen me weak so long; is the misfortune great?--we must be greater than misfortune!"

"The heavier the blow, the more deeply it affects your heart, so much the more I admire the bold courage which your majesty now, as ever, regains. I rejoice the more," added the count, "that your imperial majesty is superior to disaster, as the Ambassador General Knesebeck has just requested an audience; he bears the heavy blow which has fallen on his master well and chivalrously!"

"The poor king," cried the emperor, "he has bravely defended his rights, and he now expects from me help and protection! All those princes," he continued gloomily, "who assembled around me in the old imperial hall at Frankfort, how shall I appear before them after this shameful defeat!" And again he sank into brooding thought.

"Your majesty!" cried Count Crenneville in a low, imploring tone.

The emperor stood up.

"Bring General von Knesebeck in!"

The adjutant-general hastened to the door, and a moment afterwards returned with General

von Knesebeck, and Major von Kohlrausch.

The emperor walked towards the general and held out his hand with much emotion.

"You bring sad news, my dear general; I am filled with admiration for your royal master, and I deeply deplore that such great heroism could not command a happier result. Alas! you have found little to console you here," he added with a visible effort; and then as if unwilling to pursue the painful subject, he turned a look of enquiry towards Major von Kohlrausch.

"Your majesty," said General von Knesebeck, "I mast first beg permission to introduce to you Major von Kohlrausch, equerry to my royal master. He begs the honour of presenting a letter from our sovereign."

The emperor bowed kindly to the major, who stepped forward in a soldier-like manner and placed a writing in the emperor's hand.

He opened it quickly and looked through its brief contents.

"His majesty imparts the melancholy catastrophe to me in a few words, and refers me to you for a personal communication, major."

"My gracious master," said Major von Kohlrausch, as if repeating a military order, "commanded me to tell your imperial majesty, that after the great efforts made by his army to preserve the independence of his crown, and victoriously to defend his kingdom, and after these efforts and the successful battle of Langensalza were rendered useless by the superior numbers of the enemy, his majesty deemed his most dignified and worthy course would be to repair to your imperial majesty, his illustrious confederate."

"And his true friend!" cried the emperor warmly.

The major bowed and proceeded.

"May I ask your imperial majesty whether the visit of the king and his reception in Vienna will be agreeable to you?"

"Agreeable!" cried the emperor with animation, "I long to embrace the heroic monarch who has given us all so high an example of princely stedfastness. Truly," he proceeded with a sigh, "the king will no longer find here a powerful ally; he will find a broken power needing the greatest courage and every exertion to avert the worst consequences."

"I believe I am speaking the mind of my royal master," said Major von Kohlrausch, "when I assure your imperial majesty the king is ready and resolved to share fortune and misfortune with his illustrious ally, whose cause is his own and that of right."

The emperor looked on the ground for a moment. Then he raised his eyes with a brilliant expression, and said, his countenance glowing with courage and happy pride,--

"The friendship and the trust of so noble and heroic a heart as your king's must give courage to all, and fresh confidence in our cause. Tell your royal master I await him with impatience, and that he will find me worthy to defend the cause of right and of Germany to the uttermost. My answer to the king shall be given to you as soon as possible."

The emperor ceased. The major silently awaited a sign of dismissal.

After a few moments Francis Joseph said, in a voice of emotion,--

"The king has given us an unparalleled example of heroism. I am anxious to express my admiration for his courage and that of the crown prince during the last few days by an outward sign. I will immediately summon the chapter of the Order of Maria Theresa, and my army will be proud if the king and his son will wear upon their breasts the noblest and highest sign of honour to an Austrian soldier--wait until I can send you the insignia."

"I know my master well enough," said the major, with a joyful expression, "to be sure that such a sign will fill him with the highest satisfaction, and that the whole Hanoverian army will receive it with proud joy."

"I have been much pleased, my dear major," said the emperor, gracefully, "to receive you on this occasion as an envoy from the king. I will, with the other things, send you the cross of the Order of Leopold, and I beg you to wear it in memory of this moment, and of my friendly remembrance."

The major bowed deeply. "Without this gracious sign," he said, "I should never forget this moment."

"Now rest yourself," said the emperor, kindly, "that you may have strength when all is ready for your return."

He bowed his head as a dismissal. The major with a quick military salute left the cabinet.

"You have been in the Bavarian head-quarters," said the emperor to General von Knesebeck.

"I have, your majesty," replied he. "When, in consequence of despatches received from Count Ingelheim, your majesty commanded me to go at once to Prince Karl, and urgently to beg him, in your all-powerful name, to hasten to the assistance of the Hanoverian army, I set out immediately, and found the Bavarian head-quarters, which the day before had been at Bamberg, at Neustadt. I represented to Prince Karl the pressing danger of the Hanoverian army, and I implored him, in your majesty's name and in that of my king, to make a rapid advance towards Eisenach and Gotha, that a union might be effected, and a favourable and important change possibly be made in the whole campaign."

"And Prince Karl?" asked the emperor, anxiously.

"The prince, as well as General von der Tann, who was with him, fully acknowledged the importance of a union of the Bavarian with the Hanoverian army--they were ready to do everything in their power--as indeed had been intended at the outset of the march. At the same time his royal highness, as well as the chief of the general staff, expressed great dissatisfaction at the march of the Hanoverian army; it was then really not known where it was, and, according to information brought in, the greatest strategical faults had been committed. The prince asked me about the strength of our army, and when I replied that, according to my estimation and to the intelligence I had heard, about nineteen thousand men were under arms, he replied, 'With nineteen thousand men you should cut your way through the enemy, and not march hither and thither into positions where you must be surrounded.' General von der Tann nodded approval."

The emperor bent his head and sighed.

"I heard this with great sorrow," added the general, "and my grief was greater since I could not deny the truth of the judgment pronounced at the Bavarian headquarters. I am a general staff officer, your majesty," he said, with a sigh, "but I must own the marches which our army have made are to me quite incomprehensible, and that it would have been much easier on our part to reach the Bavarians by a hasty march, than to await their advance with these apparently aimless runnings to and fro."

"The poor king!" cried the emperor, in a sorrowful voice.

"Naturally," continued von Knesebeck, "I did not utter these ideas in the Bavarian head-quarters; on the contrary, I urged a hasty advance for the relief of the Hanoverian army--the only course as matters then were which could possibly save it. Prince Karl, in spite of his displeasure, was quite ready to comply; he immediately commanded an advance by the forest of Thuringia upon Gotha, and informed Prince Alexander of his movements, that the eighth army corps might march at the same time. But," he added, with a sigh, "the Bavarian army had been reduced to a peace footing."

"Impossible!" cried the emperor. "Bavaria urged upon the confederation so strongly the policy that led to war."

General von Knesebeck slightly shrugged his shoulders.

"Under the circumstances," he said, "the Bavarian army was not in a condition to act rapidly and forcibly. However, they set out. Prince Karl removed his headquarters to Meiningen, and with a heavy heart full of misgivings I accompanied him thither. The following day we were to proceed; then Count Ingelheim arrived, and brought the news of the catastrophe of Langensalza!"

"What a melancholy combination of disastrous events!" cried the emperor.

"Under these circumstances," continued the general, "Prince Karl was quite right in abandoning his onward march and ordering flank movements, through which to join the eighth army corps at Friedberg, seventeen miles from Meiningen. I returned here with a sorrowful heart, and found, alas! the news of the still heavier blow which has smitten your majesty and our cause."

"The blow is heavy," cried the emperor, "but I have courage, and hope all may yet be favourable. I am glad that your king's message came to-day, and that I have seen you, my dear general; it has given me fresh courage to strive to the utmost to do my duty towards Germany. Do you think," he asked, after a moment's thought, "that we may expect an energetic campaign from Bavaria? You have seen the condition of the army--you have the quick eye of a soldier--tell me candidly your opinion!"

"Your majesty," said General von Knesebeck, "Bavaria will doubtless absorb Prussian troops, and that is an advantage. As to an energetic campaign, Prince Karl is a very old gentleman, and at his years energy is unusual, especially at the head of an army unfit to fight."

"But General von der Tann?" asked the emperor.

"General von der Tann has great military capacity; whether he will be responsible for any exploit not purely Bavarian in its aim, whether with the prince's character he can effect anything,

I doubt."

"You expect then--?" asked the emperor anxiously.

"Very little!" said the general.

"And from the other German corps?" asked the emperor.

"The eighth corps can do nothing without Bavaria; and before my departure extraordinary news had arrived from Baden."

"Will Baden fall off from us?" cried the emperor.

"I do not know," said Knesebeck, "the impression made by the defeat of Königgrätz, which will perhaps be exaggerated--" He shrugged his shoulders.

"The Reichs-armee!" cried the emperor, stamping his foot upon the ground. "Do you believe," he exclaimed vehemently, "that the Austrian sun is setting? It is indeed evening," he said gloomily--"perhaps night; but," he cried, with flaming eyes, "after night comes morning!"

"The sun does not set upon the realms of Austria; your majesty must have faith in the brilliant star of your house!" cried General von Knesebeck.

"And by God!" cried the emperor, "if the star of day will once more shine favourably upon the House of Austria during this campaign, then shall your king in the full splendour of power and happiness stand next to myself in Germany!" And he held out his hand to the general with a movement of indescribable nobility.

The equerry entered.

"Count Mensdorff, your imperial majesty, has just returned, and requests an audience."

"Ah!" cried the emperor, drawing a deep breath; "at once--at once. I await him with impatience!"

And he walked forward to meet Count Mensdorff, who, at a sign from Major von Fejérvári, appeared on the threshold of the royal cabinet.

"Has your imperial majesty any further commands for me?" asked General von Knesebeck.

"Remain! remain! dear general," cried the emperor. "Count Mensdorff's intelligence will have the greatest interest for you, as well as for me!"

The general bowed.

"And now, Count Mensdorff," cried the emperor, with a trembling voice, "speak! The fate of Austria hangs on your lips!"

Count Mensdorff stood before his monarch looking quite broken down; the fatigues of the journey to headquarters had exhausted his feeble frame, nervous anxiety had drawn deep lines upon his countenance, a sorrowful expression lay around his lips, and only his dark eyes shone with feverish brilliance.

"You are exhausted!" cried the emperor; "seat yourselves, gentlemen."

And he seated himself before his writing-table. Crenneville, Count Mensdorff, and General Knesebeck placed themselves near the table.

"Your majesty," said Count Mensdorff, in his low voice, "the tidings I bring are sad,--very sad, but not hopeless."

The emperor folded his hands and looked upwards.

"The army has suffered a frightful defeat," said Count Mensdorff, "ending in a wild flight, in which all order was lost. To assemble and re-form the masses will require several days."

"But how is this possible?" cried the emperor, "how could Benedek--"

"The field-marshal," said Count Mensdorff, "was quite right when he told your majesty he could not fight with that army,--events have been unparalleled. Your majesty knows that Benedek is a good, brave general, who is quite capable of forestalling the plans and defeating the troops who operate against him. Your majesty,--I must say it,--he has in no way been supported. The general staff drew up a plan, the excellence of which I will not judge, but which the rapid, unexpected, and wonderfully combined movements of the Prussian army, the sudden and unforeseen arrival of the crown prince's forces, ought to have modified. With inconceivable blindness the general staff refused to make any modification,--to listen to any warning. Added to this, they were so little prepared for a retreat, or so incomprehensibly careless, that the officers were unacquainted with the line of retreat, and not one commandant of a regiment knew the bridges by means of which the march must be effected; thus the retreat became a flight, the

flight became the dissolution of the army."

"Terrible!" cried the emperor; "Benedek must be brought before a court-martial."

"Not Benedek, your majesty," said Count Mensdorff; "he has done what he could do; he stood at the post which had been given him, he exposed himself personally in a way seldom done by a general; and with unequalled courage he, with his whole staff, charged the enemy as if at the head of a squadron,--of course in vain. Tears came into my eyes, your majesty," proceeded Count Mensdorff, in a voice slightly trembling with emotion, "when I saw the brave general, broken down with grief, and when he said to me in his simple, soldier-like way: 'I have lost everything, except, alas! my life!' Your majesty, we must deeply regret that the field-marshal was placed in a position to which he was unequal; but to be angry with him, to blame him, is impossible."

The emperor looked silently and gloomily down before him.

"But," continued Count Mensdorff, "the general staff must be made to answer for their conduct. I am far from pronouncing a judgment; the moment has not yet come, and an impartial and calm examination is now impossible. I hope that the accused may be able to justify themselves; but a strict reckoning must be required, it is demanded by the voice of the whole army, whose heroic courage has been sacrificed in vain,--in a few days it will be demanded by the voice of the people."

"And who are the guilty?" asked the emperor.

"Lieutenant Field-Marshal von Henikstein and Major-General von Krismanic are the *accused*," said the count with emphasis; "whether they are guilty justice must decide."

"They shall be removed from their positions, and recalled here to justify themselves. Count Crenneville," cried the emperor.

"At your majesty's command," replied the adjutant-general.

"I must not conceal from your imperial majesty," continued Count Mensdorff in a calm voice, "that several parties in the army severely blame Count Clam-Gallas; they say he did not conduct his operations at the right time nor obey the orders that were given him."

"Count Clam!" exclaimed the emperor. "I do not believe it."

"I thank your imperial majesty for that word," said Count Mensdorff, "and I venture to add that I believe from his devotion to your majesty and to Austria, Count Clam-Gallas would be incapable of military negligence; nevertheless, he is my relative, he belongs to the great aristocracy of the empire--the public voice accuses him, and will condemn him the more easily if his justification is not brilliant and complete. I beg your majesty to call him to account."

"It shall be done," said the emperor, "he shall be invited here; I can then take further steps. But now," he continued, "what is to be done? is the situation hopeless?"

"Your majesty," replied Count Mensdorff, "the army still numbers 180,000 men; at the present moment they are certainly in no condition to carry on any military operation; but only time and re-formation are required to enable them to offer fresh resistance to the enemy. The fortified camp of Olmütz affords rest and safety, and the field-marshal is withdrawing his head-quarters there, to draw the enemy away from Vienna."

"To draw them away from Vienna!" repeated the emperor; "it is terrible; this enemy whom I hoped to overthrow for ever, already threatens me in my capital!"

"It is to be hoped," said Count Mensdorff, "that the Prussian army will follow the field-marshal, and be detained before Olmütz; in the meantime Vienna must be covered to provide for every contingency, and to enable us to attack the enemy on two sides when we can resume offensive measures."

General Knesebeck nodded approval, the emperor cast a look of excitement on his minister.

"And to obtain this," added Count Mensdorff, "we need Hungary and the Italian army."

The emperor rose.

"Do you believe," he cried vehemently, "that from the mouth of Hungary the words that saved Austria will again resound: *Moriamur pro rege nostro?*"

"*Pro rege nostro*," said Count Mensdorff, clearly pronouncing each word, "yes, I do believe it--if your majesty will be *rex Hungariæ!*"

"Am I not?" cried the emperor. "What shall I do to make Hungary draw the sword for me?"

"Forget and forgive," said Count Mensdorff, "and restore to Hungary her independence beneath the crown of St. Stephen."

The emperor was silent.

"And the Italian army?" he then asked.

"Must be recalled as quickly as possible, to cover Vienna, and to march against the enemy!"

"And what will become of Italy?" asked the emperor.

"Italy must be given up," said Count Mensdorff, sighing.

The emperor gave him a penetrating look.

"Give up Italy?" he asked, hesitatingly, and cast down his eyes.

"Italy or Germany," said Count Mensdorff, "and in my opinion the choice cannot be difficult."

"It is hard enough to have to make the choice," whispered the emperor.

"Your majesty, permit me to speak plainly and to express my thoughts clearly. Your imperial majesty will remember before the commencement of the war my deep anxiety at two different campaigns being carried on at the same moment. I was of the opinion that Italy ought to be sacrificed, that our position in Germany might be recovered and strengthened by an alliance with France. One might then indeed hope that without this sacrifice the war on both sides would be successfully carried on, and your majesty's great and courageous heart held firmly to this hope. Now this is no longer possible, now the sorrowful choice must be made--if we are to gain anything in Germany--if we are to maintain what we possess--the whole strength of Austria must be concentrated upon one point, the whole strength of the Italian army must be brought here, and the Arch-Duke Albert with his eagle eye must take the entire command of both armies. Thus alone is recovery possible; thus alone is it possible to keep Germany for Austria. For," he added, mournfully, "your majesty must not be deceived, the disaster of Königgrätz will have a great effect on all the lukewarm and hesitating members of the German Confederation. Baden has already fallen away."

"Baden fallen away?" cried the emperor vehemently.

"Just now, since my return, as I was preparing to come here," said Count Mensdorff, "intelligence came to the Office of State from Frankfort, that Prince William of Baden had declared on the 6th, that under existing circumstances he must refuse for the troops of Baden to co-operate with the army of the confederation."

"Such, then, is the first result of Königgrätz," said the emperor, bitterly. "But," he cried, with sparkling eyes, as he threw back his head, "they may be mistaken, these princes, whose forefathers humbly surrounded the throne of my ancestors. The power of Austria is shaken, but not destroyed; and yet again the time may come when Hapsburg will sit in judgment in Germany, to punish and reward! Count Mensdorff," he cried, with decision, "my choice is made. I give up all for Germany. But," he continued, sinking again into gloomy thought, "how can I--I, the victor, bow down before this king of Italy--implore a peace which may, perhaps, be refused?"

"Your majesty," said Count Mensdorff, "the solution of that difficulty is very simple, if you cast your eye over the political situation as it was at the beginning of the war. The Emperor Napoleon ardently desires the evacuation of Italy. He offered an alliance before the commencement of the war, of which Venetia was the price; cannot the same still be obtained? My advice, your majesty, is that we should cede Venice to the emperor of the French, who, on his part, can deliver it over to Victor Emanuel, and by this means an alliance with Napoleon will be obtained, or at least, under unfavourable circumstances, his powerful intervention. Thus the dignity of Austria will be preserved towards Italy, all direct negotiation avoided, and the whole of our force will be available for the struggle in Germany. If your majesty commands it, I will immediately speak on the subject to the Duke de Gramont, and send instructions to Prince Metternich."

The emperor was silent for some time, lost in thought. The three gentlemen sat round him motionless: it was so quiet in the cabinet that their breathing was perceptible, and in the distance was heard the echoing movement of great Vienna.

At last the emperor rose. The three gentlemen stood up.

"So be it, then," cried Francis Joseph, very gravely; "neither Spain nor Italy have brought a blessing to my house. In Germany was their cradle, in Germany grew their strength, in Germany shall lie their future!"

"Speak to Gramont immediately," he proceeded. "And you, Count Crenneville, make all the necessary arrangements for my uncle to assume the general command of all my armies, and also for bringing the army of the south hither. General Knesebeck," he said, turning towards him, "you are here as the representative of the bravest princes in Germany. You see that the heir of the German emperors sacrifices all for Germany!"

"I would that all Germany witnessed your majesty's noble decision," said the general with emotion.

"And Hungary, your majesty?" asked Count Mensdorff.

"Speak to Count Andrassy," said the emperor, with a little hesitation. "Tell him what may happen, and hear what they expect."

He made a sign with his hand, and bent his head with a friendly smile.

Bowing deeply, the three gentlemen left the cabinet.

The emperor walked to and fro several times with hasty steps.

"Thus all that the sword of Radetzky won, is lost," he said, with a deep sigh, as he stood still before the window. "That land is lost for which so much German blood has flowed! Be it so," he cried, drawing a deep breath, "if I may only retain Germany."

He looked thoughtfully down on the ground.

"But if I give up Italy," he whispered, "how can Rome, how can the Church withstand the waves which will then hurl themselves against St. Peter's rock?"

A darker gloom lay on his brow.

With a slight knock, the groom of the chambers entered by the door leading from the inner apartment.

"Count Rivero," he said, "begs for an audience, and as your majesty commanded me to announce him at once, I----"

"Is this a warning?" said the emperor, in a low tone; and he made a movement as if to decline the interview.

He then stepped back from the window, and said,--

"Let him come."

The groom of the chambers withdrew.

"I will hear him," said the emperor; "he has at least the right to candour and truth."

The door of the inner apartment was again opened, and Count Rivero entered the cabinet, looking grave and melancholy.

"You come in a heavy hour, count," said the emperor, addressing him; "the events of this day have buried many hopes."

"Just and holy hopes should never be buried, your majesty," replied the count; "yes, even if we go down to the grave, we must look with trust to the future."

The emperor gave him a scrutinizing look.

"I will not quite give up hope," he said, with a certain amount of embarrassment.

"Your majesty," said the count, after a short pause, during which the emperor expressed nothing more, "I have only heard the outlines of the great disaster; I do not yet know what its results will be, or what your majesty has determined to do. But I do know well that all is prepared in Italy for an insurrection in favour of our Holy Faith, and for the right. The Austrian victories have deeply shaken both the military and moral power of the King of Sardinia, and the moment has come to pronounce the decisive word which will set the country in flames. I beg your majesty's commands to do this, and above all I ask whether the rising in Italy will have the full and powerful support of the Austrian army. Without this, the sacrifice of many lives would be useless, and we should but injure our holy cause."

The count spoke in a calm, low voice, and in the respectful tone of a courtier, but at the same time with grave firmness, and a certain proud conviction.

The emperor cast down his eyes for a moment, then he came a step nearer to the count, and said,--

"My dear count, the enemy in Bohemia threatens the capital; the defeated army cannot operate without rest and reorganization. I need the whole strength of Austria to counteract the consequences of this defeat, to parry this threatened blow; the army of the south must cover Vienna, and give the Bohemian army time to reassemble, and strength to reassume offensive measures."

"Then your majesty will give up Italy?" said the count, with a deep sigh, but without a sign of excitement, as he fixed his dark eyes full on the emperor.

"I must," said the emperor,--"I must, unless I yield Germany, and annihilate the position of Austria; there is no escape."

"Your majesty will thus," continued the count, calmly, in his deep metallic voice, "your majesty will thus yield the iron crown of the House of Hapsburg, for ever, to the House of Savoy, yield Venice, the proud Queen of the Adriatic, to Victor Emanuel, whose army has been smitten down by the sword of Austria?"

"Not to him," cried the emperor warmly, "not to him."

"And to whom, your majesty?"

"I need the help of France," said the emperor. "I must buy the alliance of Napoleon at a price I would not pay before the commencement of the war."

"Must his cold demon-like hand again grasp the fate of Italy?" cried the count, hotly; "must Rome and the Holy See be given up for ever to the arbitrary pleasure of the earlier Carbonari?"

"Not for ever," said the emperor; "if my power is re-established in Germany, if I succeed in overcoming the danger now threatening me, the Holy See will have a more powerful protector than I now could be,--and who knows?" he continued, with animation, "Germany won Lombardy in centuries gone by."

"Then all is lost!" cried the count involuntarily, in a sorrowful voice. He quickly overcame his feelings, and said, in his usual calm voice, "Is your majesty's decision irrevocable, or may I be permitted to urge some reasons against it?"

The emperor was silent for a moment.

"Speak!" he then said.

"Your majesty hopes," said the count, "to recover your defeat by the recall of the southern army; and by ceding Venetia--that is to say, Italy--to buy the alliance of France. According to my convictions both these hopes are deceitful."

The emperor looked at him with amazement and with great attention.

"The army of the south," continued the count, "will come much too late to be of any assistance; for your majesty has to oppose a foe who will never stand still and wait; the lamentable events from which we now suffer fully prove this. The French alliance, even if your majesty purchased it, will not be worth the price you give for it, for, as I before had the honour of assuring your majesty, France is unfit to undertake any military action."

The emperor was silent.

"At the same time," added the count, "in giving up Italy your majesty gives up a great principle, you recognize revolution--revolution against legitimate right, and against the Church. You withdraw the imperial house of Hapsburg from that mighty Ally who sits in judgment high above all earthly battle-fields and cabinets, and who orders the fate of prince and people after his Eternal will. Your majesty gives up the Church, your majesty gives up the Almighty Lord, whose fortress and weapon upon earth the Holy Church is."

The emperor sighed.

"But what shall I do?" he asked sorrowfully, "shall I permit the haughty foe to enter my capital? Can a fugitive prince be a protector of the Church?"

"Your imperial majesty's ancestors," said the count, "have flown from Vienna, and because they held firmly to the right and to the Eternal and All-powerful Ally of their house, they have been gloriously restored to their capital! Besides," he continued, "much lies between the enemy and Vienna. The enemy's army has suffered greatly, and Europe will guarantee that Vienna shall not be Prussian. France must resist, even without being bought--England--at this time even Russia. Let your majesty permit the victorious army in Italy under the illustrious archduke to press onwards, and in a short time Italy will be yours. Prussia's ally is annihilated, and Holy Church will raise her powerful voice for Austria and Hapsburg; this voice must be obeyed, in Bavaria, in Germany, yes, even in France it must be obeyed, and your majesty will rise with renewed strength. Let not your majesty leave your work uncompleted, that the other side may reap the benefit of what has been done; pursue your victory to the end, then its effects will repair this misfortune; do not sacrifice victory to defeat, but heal defeat by the brilliancy of your victory!"

The count spoke more warmly than before.

He had slightly raised his hand, and he stood in his wonderful beauty an image of convincing eloquence.

The emperor was much affected, his features showed a great struggle.

"And, upon the other side," proceeded the count, "if your majesty gives up Italy, if you throw all your strength towards the north, and if this sacrifice does not bring forth the fruit expected, where will you then find help and support?--enduring support and strong help? When you have

once left the one road, when you have once parted from the One everlasting and unchanging Ally, the separation will grow greater and greater, it will become a cleft, and the power of the Church will no longer be employed on behalf of backsliding Austria. And let not the statesmen of the world despise this power," he cried, proudly drawing himself up; "if the chastening excommunication of the Vatican no longer hurls crowns from the heads of princes, and brings them in sackcloth and in tears to stand before the doors of the temple, the spirit and the words of the Church are still mighty and all-powerful in the world; and if its thunderbolt no longer shatters the rock, its rain-drops wear away the stone! Let your majesty ponder deeply before you separate from the Church."

The emperor's excited face flushed slightly; he raised his head, a proud flash gleamed in his eyes, and his lip was somewhat raised.

"Your majesty's imperial brother in Mexico," continued the count with energy, "wanders upon that dangerous path, he seeks his power in worldly aids, he has separated from the Church, he is but a plaything in the hand of Napoleon, and the path he has taken will lead him down deeper and deeper."

The emperor drew himself up to his full height.

"I thank you, Count Rivero," he said coldly, "for so plainly expressing your opinion. My resolution is made, and irrevocable! I can change nothing. I hope the way I am now taking may enable me to be useful to the Church, and to serve it as my heart desires."

The inspired excitement vanished from the count's face. His features resumed their accustomed calmness, and his eyes their still, clear look.

He waited for a few moments; and as the emperor was silent, he said, without the least trace of emotion in his voice,--

"Has your majesty any further commands?"

The emperor replied graciously:

"Farewell, count; be assured of the uprightness of my intentions, and hope with me for the future,--what you desire God may bring to pass in days to come."

"My hope never fails," replied the count calmly, "for the future belongs to the Ruler of the Universe!"

And with a deep bow he left the cabinet.

The emperor looked after him thoughtfully.

"They want to renew the days of Canossa!" he said to himself; "they deceive themselves. I will not be a servant to the Church; I will struggle and fight for the power to be her protector. And now, to work!"

He rang, the groom of the chambers appeared.

"Let States-Chancellor Klindworth be sent for without delay!"

"At your majesty's command!"

The emperor seated himself at his writing-table, and looked through various papers. But this occupation was merely mechanical. His thoughts often wandered, and the paper in his hand sank slowly down, while his eyes gazed thoughtfully into space.

Klindworth entered. His face, with its downcast eyes, was as unmoved and impenetrable as ever. His hands were folded on his breast, he bowed deeply, and remained standing near the door.

The emperor looked up as he entered, and returned his respectful greeting by a slight inclination of the head.

"Do you know what I have decided to do, my dear Klindworth?" he asked, with a piercing glance at the old man's face.

"I do know it, your imperial majesty!"

"And what do you say to it?"

"I rejoice at your majesty's decision."

The emperor appeared surprised.

"You applaud me," he asked, "for sacrificing Italy?"

"To keep Germany--yes," replied Klindworth; "your majesty can reconquer Italy by Germany--

never Germany by Italy."

"But you were against my giving up Italy before the commencement of the war," said the emperor.

"Certainly, your imperial majesty," replied Klindworth, "because I learnt from the great Metternich 'that you should never give up anything that you can possibly keep; but should you be compelled by necessity to sacrifice something, always sacrifice that which you can most easily regain.'"

"But," said the emperor, looking up with a quick piercing glance, "Rome will take this very ill, perhaps become my enemy."

"Take it ill--yes, your majesty," replied the states-chancellor: "become your enemy, that will not much matter, for Rome will always need Austria. The Church and her influence is a mighty power in political life, and we must use political powers, but we must not permit them to rule us--that was one of Metternich's first principles."

The emperor was thoughtfully silent.

"If I give up Italy, I must win the price of this sacrifice. Do you believe I shall gain an alliance with France?"

"I hope so," said Klindworth, a piercing glance appearing for a moment beneath his half-closed eyelids, "if the diplomatists do their duty."

"If they do their duty," said the emperor pondering. "My dear Klindworth," he continued, "you must go at once to Paris and use all your talents to induce Napoleon to undertake active measures."

"I will set off with the next courier, your majesty," said Klindworth, without the least change in his expression.

"You know the situation well, and will do the best you can with it?" asked the emperor.

"Your majesty may rely upon me," said Klindworth.

The emperor was silent for some time, and passed his fingers lightly over the table.

"What do they say in Vienna?" he asked at last, in a tone of indifference.

"I trouble myself very little about what they say," replied the states-chancellor, with a quiet, searching glance at the emperor; "but I have heard enough to know that public opinion is courageous, and expects much from the Archduke Albert and the army of Italy."

"Do they speak of my brother Maximilian?" asked the emperor, in a slightly constrained voice.

Again a quick glance shot from Klindworth's eyes.

"I have heard nothing; what should they say about him?"

"There are people," returned the emperor, in a low tone, "who pronounce my brother's name in conjunction with this unhappy catastrophe." And again he was silent, a dark cloud gathering on his brow.

"The best means for making Vienna pronounce one name," said Klindworth, "is for your majesty to show yourself."

"How? Would you have me drive in the Prater?" asked the emperor, with the same gloomy look.

"Your majesty," said Klindworth, "a number of Austrian and Saxon officers, who have been wounded, have just arrived, and have come to the Golden Lamb in the Leopoldstadt. May I humbly suggest that your majesty should visit these wounded soldiers? It would make an excellent impression."

"Immediately," cried the emperor; "and not to make an impression. My heart urges me at once to welcome these brave men, and to thank them."

He rose.

"Does your imperial majesty," said Klindworth, in a humble voice, "wish that the money for my journey should be paid by the government?"

"No," said the emperor. He opened a small casket standing upon the table, and took out two rouleaux, which he gave to Klindworth.

"Is it enough?" he asked.

"Quite," he replied, whilst his eyes sparkled for a moment. He seized the rouleaux, and they vanished in the pocket of his brown great-coat.

"Now," said the emperor, "start at once, and come back soon. If it is needful, send me information in the way you know. Above all, obtain--what is possible."

He slightly bent his head. Klindworth bowed, and quickly vanished, without opening the door wider than was absolutely necessary, and without making the least sound.

The emperor rang, and ordered his carriage and his equerries.

Then he drove to the Golden Lamb, and visited the wounded officers.

The Viennese, who saw him drive through the streets in his open carriage, looking proud and cheerful, said, "Things cannot be so bad after all, for the emperor is well and happy."

When he left the hotel, a dense crowd had collected before the house, and the emperor was greeted with loud, enthusiastic cheers.

Far and near, loud cries resounded of "Eljen! Eljen!"

The emperor listened with mingled feelings, and sank again into deep thought, whilst the carriage slowly parted the thick crowd, and then at a quick trot bore him back to the Hofburg.

CHAPTER XVIII.

DIPLOMACY.

Napoleon III. sat in his cabinet in the Tuileries. The heavy curtains were drawn back from the windows, and the bright rays of morning entered the room.

The emperor wore a light morning dress; his hair and his long moustache were carefully arranged, and his aged, wearied, and anxious face had the look of freshness which a night's rest and a carefully-arranged toilette give even to an invalid.

Beside him, on a small table, stood a lighted wax taper, and the simple service of silver and Sevres china in which he prepared his own tea. He was smoking a large dark-brown Havannah, and a blue cloud of fine smoke filled the cabinet, and mingling with the aroma of the tea, and the eau de lavande with which the room had been prepared before the emperor's entrance, and the fresh air, shed an agreeable fragrance through the apartment.

The emperor held some papers and telegrams in his hand, and his face wore a cheerful and satisfied expression.

Before him stood his confidential secretary, Piétri.

"Everything falls to those who know how to wait," said the emperor, with a smile. "I was urged to interfere in this German war--to rash and hasty action--and now? I think I have gained more and done better than if I--quite against my conviction and inclinations--had interfered with the natural course of events.

"The emperor of Austria," he continued, "yields me Venetia, and calls for my mediation to stay the advance of the victorious foe. Thus I have Italy in my hand to oppose to the situation. The defeated Italians will have to thank me for the restoration of their last province, and my promise, 'Free to the Adriatic,' will be kept!" He gave a sigh of relief. "Then I have won much influence and prestige," he added, laughing, "and prestige avails me more than power or influence. The king of Prussia accepts my mediation to begin with, only for a suspension of arms, but the rest will follow, and I am thus the arbitrator of Germany! Could I have gained more?" he asked, with a long breath at his cigar, whilst he contentedly regarded the white ashes, and slowly puffed away the blue smoke in small clouds; "could I have done more if the armies of France had taken the field?"

"Certainly not," returned Piétri; "and I admire your majesty's quick-sightedness. I must own I was not without anxiety at France being withheld from taking any part in these great events. Nevertheless, may I call your majesty's attention to the fact that the situation is much clearer on the side of Italy even if there is a slight disinclination on the part of the king to receive Venice as a gift, than it is with regard to the German powers. Accepting your mediation as a principle--"

"Will lead to further negotiations and to practical results," interrupted the emperor. "I know

well that both sides have their own plans in the background. Well," he said, smiling, "I have mine."

"It is certainly a great thing," he continued, after a short pause, "that the cannon should be silenced by my first word of reconciliation, and that the gentle and friendly voice of France should force both mighty foes to lower their arms, at least for a moment, whilst they listen respectfully to my words. Such is my position as mediator in Germany. And thus it must be represented to public opinion," he added; "it is very important that this should not interfere with my calm and prudent action."

"This has been done, sire," said Piétri. "The 'Moniteur' has represented your majesty's mediation quite in this spirit, and all the leading newspapers have thus described the situation."

"Good, good," said the emperor. "And how does the sovereign public opinion of my good Paris regard the affair?"

"Excellently," replied Piétri; "all the organs of the press describe the position of France in this conflict as highly flattering to the national dignity."

The emperor nodded his head with an air of satisfaction.

"I cannot, however, conceal from your majesty," continued Piétri, "that I have observed a strong Prussian tendency in the journals; the Prussian Consul Bamberg, who as your majesty knows takes charge of these affairs at the embassy, has for some time been strongly and cleverly supported by 'le Temps,' 'le Siècle,' and other newspapers."

The emperor was thoughtfully silent.

"The question is," continued Piétri, "whether this agitation shall be counteracted?"

"No," said the emperor decidedly, "it would be far from my wish for public opinion strongly to take up the side of Austria; it would be inconvenient. I must tell you honestly," he proceeded after thinking deeply for a moment, "that I have very little confidence in Austria, she seems to me to be in the process of dissolution and near her fall. The great emperor had this same thought," he added half speaking to himself, "they did not understand him in Berlin, and were punished for it at Jena--Count Bismarck is no Haugwitz, and--but," he said, suddenly interrupting himself, "does Austria make no effort to work on public opinion here?"

Piétri shrugged his shoulders.

"Prince Metternich," he said, "is too much a grand seigneur to trouble himself to descend from the heights of Olympus into the dark and murky atmosphere of journalism, for which in Austria they maintain a most sovereign contempt."

"Yes, yes," said the emperor, "these legitimate diplomatists breathe and move upon their Olympian heights without regarding what takes place on earthly dust, and yet it comes from below that public opinion, that Proteus-like power who weaves the threads upon the loom of eternal Fate, that mysterious power, before whose sentence the proud gods of Olympus and of Tartarus tremble."

"Something," said Piétri, laughing, "has been done by Austria to influence public opinion--in very long, correct, and diplomatic articles the 'Mémorial diplomatique' explains--"

"Debraux de Saldapenda?" asked the emperor, smiling.

"Your majesty is right!"

"Certainly," said Napoleon, as he brushed the ashes of his cigar from his trousers, "a small counter influence can do no harm. Let an article appear here and there, calling attention to the necessity of not allowing Austria's position in Europe to be too much weakened. You understand, in Europe, not a word about Germany, and the articles must bear the stamp of official Austrian origin, the journalists themselves must believe they come from thence. You will know how to arrange this?"

"Perfectly, sire," replied Piétri.

"Laguerronière told me," continued the emperor, "of a very clever little journalist--Escudier--he has relations in Austria; make use of him, we must certainly strengthen our newspaper contingent," he proceeded, "our cadres are very small, and we must make a campaign. Think over this."

Piétri bowed.

The groom of the chambers announced: "His Excellency Monsieur Drouyn de Lhuys."

The emperor bent his head, took a last whiff from his cigar, and said to his secretary, "Stay near me, I may need you."

Piétri withdrew through the large and heavy portière, which concealed the steps leading to his own room.

Scarcely had the folds of the curtain closed behind him, when Drouyn de Lhuys entered the emperor's cabinet. He looked as calm and grave as ever, and had his portfolio under his arm.

"Good morning, my dear minister," cried Napoleon, rising slowly and holding out his hand, "well, are you satisfied with the course of events, and the position which the policy of waiting has procured for us?"

"Not entirely, sire," replied Drouyn de Lhuys gravely and quietly. A cloud passed over the emperor's brow. Then he said in a friendly voice,--

"You are an incorrigible pessimist, my dear minister; what could you require more? Are we not at this moment the umpire of Europe?"

"An umpire, sire," said Drouyn de Lhuys inexorably, "who does not yet know whether the contending parties will accept his award. The best umpire is he who throws his sword into the balance, of which Brennus the ancestor of the Gauls has given us an example."

"I might be listening to the most fiery of my marshals, and not to my Secretary of State and of Foreign Affairs," said the emperor, laughing, "but to speak gravely, why are you not satisfied? I know that we have before us many involved and difficult negotiations, but," he added courteously, "can that alarm you, the experienced statesman, so capable of finding Ariadne's clue in all such labyrinths? I believe that we have won the game if we can only bring matters upon the field of long negotiations. Sudden events are what I most fear. They exclude logic, combination, and the weapons of the mind."

Drouyn de Lhuys was silent for a moment, and his eyes rested on the emperor's face, so much more animated than usual.

"I know," he then said, "that your majesty loves to tie Gordian knots, but you forget that we have to do with a man who is apt to hew through such works of art with his sword, and who has a very sharp sword in his hand!"

"But, my dear minister," said the emperor, "you would not have me at this moment, when my mediation is accepted, step between the two combatants with my weapon in my hand?"

"Not in your hand, your majesty," replied Drouyn de Lhuys, "but with a sharp sword by your side. Sire, the moment is grave, the French mediation cannot be Platonic; your majesty must clearly perceive what may arise through your intervention."

"In the first place, that this unpleasant din of cannon in Germany will cease,--it makes all calm and skilful diplomacy impossible! *Cedant arma togæ!* And, then--but what is your opinion of the situation, and what do you think we ought to do?" he said, interrupting himself, whilst his half-closed eyes opened and a full glance from his brilliant phosphorescent pupils fell upon his minister.

He seated himself, pointing with his hand to an easy-chair for Drouyn de Lhuys to occupy.

"Sire," said the latter, as he sat down, "your majesty must be clear as to the influence you wish to exercise upon the events that have already taken place in Germany. Two courses are possible, and with your permission I will analyze them before your majesty. After the information we have received from Benedetti, after what Goltz has imparted to us, it is impossible to imagine that Prussia will entirely give up the advantages she has procured by the amazing success of her arms--upon which we must remember the monarchy of Hohenzollern had staked--perhaps its existence."

The emperor nodded acquiescence.

"According to my information, and my conception of Count Bismarck's character, he will require not only the exclusion of Austria from German affairs, not only the leadership of Germany at least to the Main, for Prussia, he will also require an increase of territory, the annexation of Hanover, Hesse, and Saxony."

The emperor raised his head.

"Hesse," he said, "that touches me not. Hanover, I have a great esteem for King George and sympathise with him, since I knew him at Baden-Baden; but Hanover is England's affair. Saxony," he said, slightly twirling the point of his moustache, "that is different; that touches the traditions of my house. But," he interrupted himself, "go on."

"Austria," said Drouyn de Lhuys, calmly continuing the subject, "will be forced to yield to these demands, for it is in no condition to continue the war. The army of the south will not return in time, and upon Hungary, so my agents assure me, there is no reliance to be placed; it will therefore depend upon the influence of France whether Prussia obtains what she demands."

The emperor was silent.

"Two paths are possible to your majesty in this position of affairs."

The emperor listened with the greatest interest.

"One course," said Drouyn de Lhuys, "is for your majesty to say: 'The German Confederation, as guaranteed by Europe, is dissolved, and all the German princes have simply become European sovereigns, who are allies of France. France refuses that the balance of power in Germany and in Europe should be disturbed, by any change in their possessions or their sovereign rights.' Your majesty can divide the German Confederation into a North German and a South German group, the first to be under the leadership of Prussia, the second under Austria, and you can forbid all other change. This is the course," added the minister, "that I should advise your majesty to pursue."

The emperor bent himself down thoughtfully.

"And if Prussia rejects this proposal, or rather this award?" he asked.

"Then your majesty must march to the Rhine and follow the example of Brennus," said Drouyn de Lhuys.

"What should I gain?" asked Napoleon. "Would not divided Germany be as ready to unite against France, perhaps more strongly organized in two parts, as was ever the old German Confederation? And the other course?" he then asked.

"If your majesty will not follow the path I have pointed out," said Drouyn de Lhuys, "then, in my opinion, France must act towards Germany as she acted towards Italy. She must allow events to take their natural course, she must consent to an entire or partial national union beneath Prussia, and to the territorial acquisitions of Prussia,--and she must demand on her part compensation."

The eyes of the emperor lighted up.

"And what compensation would you demand?" he asked.

"Benedetti maintains," said Drouyn de Lhuys, "that in Berlin they are much inclined to give us possession of Belgium."

The emperor nodded approval.

"I do not," added the minister, "approve this policy; we shall gain little as far as military position is concerned, and we shall be burdened with great complications towards England."

The emperor shrugged his shoulders slightly.

"But Belgium is French," he said.

"Sire," replied Drouyn de Lhuys, "by the same right Alsace is German."

"Ah! bah!" exclaimed the emperor, involuntarily. "But," said he, "where would you seek compensation?"

"Sire," replied Drouyn de Lhuys, "if the military and political unity of Germany is consolidated under the leadership of Prussia its new power will be very dangerous to France, dangerous to our influence, yes, even to our safety. We must therefore on our side demand guarantees against an aggressive policy from newly constituted Germany. In the next place," he added, as the emperor remained silent, "we must demand, as is only right and moderate, the extension of the French boundaries as established by the Congress of 1814."

The emperor bowed his head with animation.

"Then, sire," continued Drouyn de Lhuys, as he fixed his keen eyes upon the emperor, "we must demand Luxembourg and Mayence."

"That is much," said the emperor, without looking up.

"But not too much!" returned Drouyn de Lhuys. "Luxembourg too is only a question between us and Holland, and only the silent consent of Prussia will be needed. Mayence--well, they may demur about that, but it is better to ask more than you positively intend to take. That is my idea of compensation," he added after a short pause.

"And it is mine," said the emperor, rising; and with his slow halting gait he took several turns about the room.

He stood still before Drouyn do Lhuys, who had also risen, and said,--

"I regret, my dear minister, that I cannot decide upon following the first course you pointed out; since you consider it the right one."

"I pointed out the second as the best alternative," said Drouyn de Lhuys; "and although I

should have preferred the former, I fully approve of the second."

"Give me the second," said the emperor, "let Herr von Bismarck unite Germany as well as he can, and let us strengthen the power of France as much as possible. Write to Benedetti at once, order him to go to head-quarters and to negotiate at first a simple suspension of arms; let us first quiet those cannon and make room for calm diplomacy. Let him then raise the question of compensation in a confidential conversation with Herr von Bismarck, and suggest Luxembourg and Mayence."

Drouyn de Lhuys bowed.

"But without engaging himself too much, without stating any ultimatum. I will keep my hand free," said the emperor with animation.

"Our interests can only be preserved, sire," said Drouyn de Lhuys, "if our attitude is decided, and our speech firm."

"They shall be so," cried the emperor; "but we must not begin with the ultimatum. Let Benedetti sound, and skilfully discover how his proposals are received."

"And what will your majesty say to Austria?" asked Drouyn de Lhuys.

"That we are taking the greatest pains to make the peace as favourable as possible, and to preserve the territorial possessions and the European position of Austria. We must," he added, "advise Vienna to be ready to continue the war in case we are unsuccessful, for who knows what turn affairs may take, and, besides, a firm attitude on the part of Austria, and an increase of the difficulties Prussia finds on that side, can only be favourable to us."

"I am quite of your majesty's opinion, and I shall write in this spirit to the Duke de Gramont immediately. I must now mention to your majesty that Herr von Beust has arrived and requests an audience."

"Beust, the Saxon minister?" asked the emperor with surprise.

"He arrived in Paris this morning, and was with me before I came here," said Drouyn de Lhuys.

"And what does he want?" enquired Napoleon.

"To call upon your majesty to protect Saxony."

"I will see him," said Napoleon after a short pause; "but without ceremonial."

"That is also the wish of Herr von Beust, your majesty."

"Beg him to announce himself through Colonel Favé, who is on duty. I will instruct the colonel to bring him without exciting observation."

"Very well, sire. To-day or to-morrow I expect Prince Reuss, who is sent by the King of Prussia with letters to your majesty from head-quarters at Pardubitz."

"From where?" asked the emperor.

"Pardubitz, sire," repeated Drouyn de Lhuys, pronouncing the word very distinctly.

"What a name!" cried Napoleon. "And do you know what he brings?"

"The conditions of peace," said Drouyn de Lhuys; "without their previous acceptance the King of Prussia will conclude no armistice. So says Count Goltz, who informed me of the prince's coming by a telegram."

"And were these conditions known to Count Goltz?" asked the emperor further.

"From his previous and general instructions I take it they were the same as I have already imparted to your majesty,--Austria's exclusion from Germany, the leadership of Prussia, and the annexation of the territory lying between the separate portions of Prussia," returned Drouyn de Lhuys.

"Then his arrival will alter nothing in our policy," said the emperor. "We will await him."

"Permit me once more to draw your majesty's attention to the fact," said Drouyn de Lhuys, in an impressive tone, as he fixed his penetrating eyes upon the emperor, "that whatever policy France may adopt, our interests cannot be preserved unless our language is very firm, and our attitude decided."

"It shall be so," said the emperor, "in the groundwork of the plan; the form of negotiation must nevertheless be circumspect. Impress this upon Benedetti."

"We have the greater reason to be firm," said Drouyn de Lhuys, "because a new difficulty is

arising for Prussia, which will make the court at Berlin all the more anxious to arrange affairs with us. An article from the official journal of St. Petersburg has been sent to me, in which it is stated that the suspension of arms would lead to a definite reconciliation, if there was not someone in Germany who thought himself strong enough to compel Europe to consent to his German conquests, forgetting that there still existed sovereigns in Europe whose united forces could prevent the balance of power from being an idle word."

And Drouyn de Lhuys drew a newspaper from his portfolio, and handed it to the emperor.

He took it, glanced through it hastily, and laid it on the table.

"That is plain," he said, laughing; "and the address of the warning cannot be doubtful."

"Baron Talleyrand maintains this article is the expression of the opinion of the court party," said Drouyn de Lhuys; "and that, although the emperor and Prince Gortschakoff are reserved, they regard the catastrophe now taking place in Germany with the greatest interest."

"Excellent, excellent!" cried the emperor. "Instruct Talleyrand to foster this feeling as much as possible. He must," said he, after a thoughtful pause, "point out especially that the interests of Russia and France are identical in preventing Germany from concentrating her military power in the hand of Prussia."

"I have prepared an instruction to that effect, sire," said Drouyn de Lhuys, "since I thought I foresaw such an intention on the part of your majesty."

"And," said the emperor, as if seized by a sudden thought; but he broke off quickly, and said, laughingly,--

"You see, my dear minister, how everything unites in placing the threads of the European situation again in our hands: we have all the advantages of a victorious battle, without a shot having been fired, or one Frenchman having been sent out of the world."

"I shall be glad if all comes to a favourable end," replied Drouyn de Lhuys, as he closed his portfolio.

"And do not forget," said the emperor, in a gracious tone, repeating his minister's words, "that our language must be firm, and our attitude decided."

He held out his hand to his minister.

"I may then send Herr von Beust here immediately?" said Drouyn de Lhuys, preparing to go.

"Do so," said the emperor; "and as soon as anything fresh arises, I expect you."

With an engaging smile, he made one step towards the door, through which, with a low bow, Drouyn de Lhuys withdrew.

The emperor walked thoughtfully several times up and down his cabinet. Then he went to the portière, which concealed the private stairs, and called,--

"Piétri."

He appeared immediately.

"Have you seen this article from the 'Journal de St.-Pétersbourg'?" asked the emperor, handing his secretary the paper he had received from Drouyn de Lhuys.

"I have," replied Piétri, after glancing at it hastily; "I had it ready to present to your majesty."

"All goes on excellently," said the emperor, rubbing his hands. "We must increase this difficulty arising for the victor of Königgrätz in the East as much as possible. I have ordered Talleyrand to dwell upon the identity of the French and Russian interests."

Piétri bowed.

The emperor slightly turned the points of his moustache.

"You might write to him quite confidentially," he proceeded, "saying that there is no intention of allowing the idea to transpire hastily; but that since 1854 and 1856, the European situation has much changed, and that now an understanding between France and Russia upon the Eastern question would, perhaps, be possible and desirable. Should a common policy facilitate the arrangement of the German difficulty, a revision of the Treaty of Paris would probably not be refused here. But this must be quite private," he said, with emphasis, "engaging us to nothing, and in the strictest confidence."

"Very good, it shall be done at once," said Piétri.

"Sire," he said, after waiting for a moment, during which the emperor was silent, "Herr Klindworth is here, and wishes to see your majesty."

"Klindworth?" cried the emperor, laughing, "that old stormy petrel could not keep out of a crisis which has raised such a tempest in European policy. What does he want?"

"He comes from Vienna, and wants to impart to your majesty much that is interesting."

"He is always interesting, and he often has clever ideas," cried the emperor. "Bring him here at once."

Piétri ran down the steps, and returned in a few moments with States-Chancellor Klindworth, who appeared from behind the dark, heavy portière, which the private secretary closed again after his entrance.

The emperor and Klindworth were alone. The latter stood in the same attitude, the same brown coat, and the same white cravat as in the cabinet of Francis Joseph. With downcast eyes he waited, after a low bow, for the emperor to speak.

"Welcome, dear Herr Klindworth," said Napoleon, in his peculiarly winning and fascinating way, "come and sit near me, that we may talk of these wonderful and stormy events which have so disturbed the peace of the whole world."

He sank again into his arm-chair, and Klindworth, taking in the expression of the emperor's countenance with a hasty glance, seated himself opposite.

Napoleon opened a small étui, twirled up a large cigarette of Turkish tobacco with great dexterity, and lighted it at the wax taper on the table beside him.

"I am glad," said Klindworth, "to see your majesty looking so well and cheerful, in the midst of these great catastrophes. His majesty Francis Joseph will be much rejoiced when I tell him of your majesty's excellent health.''

"You come from the Emperor Francis Joseph?" said Napoleon, with aroused attention.

"You know, sire," said Klindworth, folding his hands over his breast, "I am no ambassador; I represent nothing. I am only old Klindworth, who has the good fortune to be honoured by the confidence of those in the very highest positions, and who uses his healthy old wits in the diplomatic world, endeavouring to set straight what inexperienced folly has set crooked."

The emperor laughed, whilst he blew a thick cloud from his cigarette.

"And do you come to correct a little of the folly that goes on in the Tuileries?" he then asked.

"If your majesty speaks of the Tuileries I must be silent," said Klindworth, "but if you speak of the Quai d'Orsay, I shall not say no; there they can always do with a little good advice."

The emperor laughed still more. "Well," he said, "what advice would you give to the Quai d'Orsay? Perhaps I can support it."

A rapid glance shot from the eyes of the states-chancellor. He lightly tapped the fingers of the right hand upon the back of the left, and said,--

"I would recall to your majesty's ministers and diplomatists the old formula: Videant consoles ne quid detrimenti capiat respublica!"

The emperor immediately grew grave; his quick, brilliant eyes were suddenly raised from beneath their drooping lids, and fixed with a burning expression upon Klindworth, who sat before him without moving a muscle. Then he leant back in his arm-chair, blew from him a thick cloud of smoke, and asked in a quiet tone,--

"Do you think, then, that things are so bad? Now that the emperor has determined to evacuate Venetia all his forces will be free, and the fortune of war may change."

"I do not believe it will change, sire," said Klindworth, calmly, "and according to my opinion, your majesty must take heed lest your defeat should bring upon you still worse consequences."

"My defeat?" inquired Napoleon, drawing himself up proudly, whilst his moustache glided through his fingers.

"Sire, Königgrätz was as great a defeat to France as to Austria."

The emperor was silent.

"Does your majesty think," continued Klindworth, "it added to the prestige of France--and to imperial France prestige is needful--that without her concurrence all European affairs should be turned upside down, that a great Prusso-German military monarchy should arise, without France's interference? The cabinets of Europe will thus learn to arrange their own matters without heeding France, and your majesty can conceive better than I, what effect this will produce upon the French nation."

The emperor considered. Then he said, calmly and gravely: "What does the Emperor Francis Joseph intend to do, and what does he expect of me?"

Klindworth showed not the least surprise at this suddenly direct question, and at the different tone it gave to the conversation.

"The emperor," said he, "is determined to fight to the last. He hopes, by the withdrawal of the southern army, to gain the necessary strength to resume action; he hopes Hungary----"

The emperor slightly shook his head.

"He hopes," continued Klindworth, "that the armistice will give him time to reassemble his forces, and that the Prussian demands will be so exorbitant as to render peace impossible. He expects that your majesty will march to the Rhine, that Austria will be freed from her difficulties, and Prussia hurled from the height upon which the victory of Königgrätz has placed her."

The emperor was silent for a moment.

"Will there not be difficulties," he then said, without looking up, "in the fulfilment of these numerous hopes?"

"If your majesty sees them," returned Klindworth, "they are certainly there."

"And do you not see them?" asked the emperor.

"Sire," replied Klindworth, "I received orders to urge your majesty to hasty action with an armed hand. That is my commission; if your majesty will give me an answer, I will, if you command me, tell you my opinion."

"You define sharply," said the emperor, laughing. "Well," he proceeded slowly, turning his cigarette between his fingers, "I will speak without reserve. The emperor may rest assured that I regard a strong Austria absolutely necessary to peace and the balance of power in Europe, and that I will prevent Austria's displacement from her European position with the whole force of France, if needful. I do not, however, believe that this supreme moment has yet come, and I might do more harm than good by an armed interference, for at this moment there is no reason for pushing the German question into a European crisis."

Klindworth listened attentively, accompanying with an inclination of the head each word, as it was slowly uttered by the emperor.

"Your majesty wishes to wait," he then said, "and to keep your hand free as long as possible, but you will prevent any alienation of territory from Austria itself."

The emperor slightly bent his head.

"But one circumstance must by no means be excluded from our arrangements," he said; "every effort must be made in Vienna to alter the military position in Austria's favour."

"I understand perfectly, sire," said the states-chancellor.

"Well, now, my dear Herr Klindworth," said the emperor, throwing away the remains of his cigarette into a small china vase, and preparing a fresh one with the greatest care and attention, "you will tell me your opinion, since you have heard my intentions."

And he bent his head slightly to one side, and looked at Klindworth attentively.

"My opinion, sire, is that you are perfectly right."

Surprise was seen on the emperor's countenance.

"Your majesty is perfectly right," repeated Klindworth, looking up with a quick, watchful glance, "for in the first place," he continued, in a matter-of-fact tone, "waiting gives you a chance of demanding compensation for France."

The emperor's eyelids were almost entirely closed; he had completed his cigarette, and blew a thick cloud into the air before him.

"And besides," continued Klindworth, quitting his former remark completely, and somewhat raising his voice, "your majesty has a double reason for avoiding a brusque interference, you would benefit France as well as Austria very little."

The emperor listened with interest.

"If your majesty now interferes with an armed hand in the affairs of Germany," said Klindworth, drumming with his fingers, "two courses are possible. Prussia may yield, in which case things will remain as they are. Prussia will only be regarded as the President of the Confederation, and obtain some small territorial accession; in material matters she will remain as she was, but an immense moral weapon will have been placed in her hand. The German people

will be told that the union of Germany has been prevented by France, that Austria has called in the national enemy, and as in Germany they may now write, read, and sing what they please, and as the newspapers and books and songs are made in Berlin, Austria's position amongst the German people would be morally annihilated, and on some future occasion--perhaps when France was engaged in some contrary direction--the perfectly ripened fruit would fall into the hands of the Hohenzollerns."

The emperor turned his moustache, and nodded approval.

"But," continued Klindworth, "and the character of her leaders renders this supposition the most probable, Prussia may not yield, but may undertake the war notwithstanding its enormous proportions. I fear then, Herr von Bismarck would succeed in inflaming a national war, and would lead united Germany against France."

"Would this be possible with the present feeling of Germany?" asked the emperor.

"Sire," said Klindworth, "if moving water will not freeze in winter an iron bar is thrown in, and the ice-rind forms at once. The sword of France thrown into the German movement would act like that iron bar, the waves would be still, and would form into a solid mass."

"But the South Germans?" asked the emperor--"both the people and the governments?"

"They have now lost all hope in Austria," said Klindworth; "they feel themselves in the power of Prussia; with a few promises, a few kind words, and a few threats it will not be difficult to gain them over to her side, for of this I am certain, they only want some reasonable and honourable excuse to join her."

The emperor was silent.

"If, however," said Klindworth with animation, "Prussia at once obtains what she desires, namely immediate and important accessions of territory, the complete annexation of Hanover, Hesse, &c.,--if only sufficient pressure is applied as to enable South Germany to retain its sovereign independence--the result will not be the union of Germany, that popular idea of all poets, singers, and beer-drinkers; on the contrary, it will be its separation, and all the blood that has been shed will only have been for the aggrandizement of Prussia. Domestic nationality, that feeling so dear to the German, will be directed against Prussia, and the national sympathy will turn towards Austria."

"Will this be possible?" asked the emperor.

"Certain," replied Klindworth; "if Austria, penetrated by another spirit, uses with prudent policy those powers which are now once more so active and potent--alas! that it should be so; but we must work with what will effect most."

"That is?" asked the emperor.

"Sire," said Klindworth, "if Prussia is increased in size by these annexations, and obtains the leadership in North Germany, she will be compelled to adopt a strict, unbending government, for the German races do not easily assimilate. One iron hand will be laid on North Germany, and the other constantly raised to menace South Germany. Then Austria must arise with fresh strength, as the shield of individual government, of independence, and of Liberty."

Napoleon smiled.

"Of liberty?"

"Why not?" cried Klindworth; "severe sicknesses are healed by means of dangerous poisons."

"But where is the skilful physician?" asked the emperor, laughing, "who can administer to sick Austria the proper dose of this poison? Count Mensdorff or Metternich?"

"I think I have found this physician," said Klindworth, gravely, without appearing perplexed.

The groom of the chambers entered.

"Colonel Favé is in the ante-room, sire."

The emperor rose.

"In one moment," he said.

Klindworth stood up and came nearer to the emperor.

"This physician," he said, in a low voice, "is von Beust."

Puzzled and amazed, the emperor gazed at him.

"Beust!" he cried, "the Protestant! Do you believe that the emperor----"

"I do believe it," said Klindworth; "but at all events, Herr von Beust is here; your majesty can sound him for yourself, and see whether my opinion is well founded."

He fixed his sharp eyes longer and more firmly than before upon the emperor, with a penetrating glance.

Napoleon smiled.

"He who plays with you," he said, "must lay his cards upon the table. Wait with Piétri; I will see you again after I have spoken with your physician upon the future of Austria."

A smile of contentment played round the states-chancellor's thick lips, as with a low bow he withdrew through the portière.

The emperor rang.

"Colonel Favé!"

The colonel, a thin man of middle height, with short black hair, and a small moustache, dressed in a black overcoat, half soldier, half courtier in manner, appeared at the door. He held it open for the minister of Saxony to enter, and he then withdrew.

Herr von Beust wore a grey overcoat, of some light summer material, thrown back from over his black coat, upon which sparkled the white star of the Legion of Honour. His slightly grey hair was carefully curled and arranged; his wide black trousers almost concealed the small foot in its well-fitting boot. His fine intellectual countenance, with its almost transparent complexion, eloquent mouth, and lively bright eyes, was paler than usual, and the amiable, winning smile was entirely gone. A melancholy expression was seen on his lips, and his whole face showed nervous anxiety.

He approached the emperor with the grace of a distinguished courtier, and bowed in silence.

Napoleon went to meet him with his fascinating smile, and held out his hand to him.

"However sorrowful may be the occasion," he said in a gentle voice, "I rejoice to see the most reliable and talented statesman in Germany."

"The most unhappy, sire," said von Beust sadly.

"They only are unhappy who have lost hope," replied the emperor, seating himself, and pointing out a chair to Herr von Beust, with a movement full of graceful courtesy.

"Sire, I have come to hear from your majesty's lips if I may still hope, and bid my sovereign do the same?"

The emperor's fingers glided over the points of his moustache.

"Tell me," he then said, "your views on events in Germany. I am anxious to have them pictured by your mouth, the mouth of a master of narrative and description," he added, with a gracious smile and a slight inclination of the head.

Beust's pale face grew animated.

"Sire," he said, "I have lost my game! I hoped to have created a new federal form of national life in Germany; to have repressed within definite boundaries the ambition of Prussia, and to have established the German Confederation in renewed power and authority, by enabling it to carry out freely the developments required by the present times. I deceived myself; I reckoned without considering the divisions in Germany, the weakness of Austria. The game is lost," he repeated, sighing; "but at least Saxony did all in her power to win."

"And is no lucky change in the game possible?" asked the emperor.

"I believe not," said von Beust; "in Vienna they still hope much from the southern army--from resuming the offensive. I do not believe in all that. A state does not easily recover from such a blow as Königgrätz, even if its inner life has not the stagnation, and has not fallen into the indolence, of Austria. Prussia is the victor in Germany, and will seize a victor's rights with an iron hand, if not restrained by a powerful veto."

His keen eyes were raised inquiringly to the emperor.

"And you think that I ought to pronounce this veto--that I can?" asked Napoleon.

"Sire," replied von Beust, "I speak to your majesty as minister of Saxony, as servant to my unhappy monarch, who is threatened with the loss of the inheritance of his ancestors, as far as it still remains to him."

"Do you think," interrupted the emperor, "that in Prussian head-quarters they mean seriously to disinherit the German princes?"

"The incorporation of Hanover, Hesse, and Saxony is determined upon, sire," said Herr von Beust with decision; "and," he continued, slightly shrugging his shoulders, "they laid high stakes upon the game in Berlin--it is perhaps natural that they should not be satisfied with the stakes alone, but make use of the advantage with regard to the future. But," he added after a moment's pause, "Hanover and Hesse divide the Prussian dominions, Saxony, on the contrary, separates Prussia from Austria and prevents continual friction; above all, Hanover and Hesse pursued a path of their own; with regard to the real interests of Germany they remained coldly passive; even when war was unavoidable they concluded no alliance with Austria--if fate overtakes them, they must in great measure ascribe it to themselves. To uphold Saxony, however, is a question of honour for Austria, and," he proceeded, looking full at the emperor, "perhaps for France also, for imperial France, for the heir to Napoleon the First's power and glory."

The emperor bent his head and slowly stroked his moustache.

"Sire," continued von Beust, whilst a tinge of red flushed his pale face, and with his eyes still fixed upon the emperor, "when the power of your great-uncle was shattered by the hand of fate at Leipsic--when so many whom he had raised up and made great forsook him, the King of Saxony stood beside him, a true friend, an ally in misfortune. And heavy penance he had to do for his truth, with half his lands he paid for his allegiance to his imperial friend. The emperor never forgot it, and even in St. Helena he remembered his noble confederate with emotion and grief."

The emperor bent his head lower and lower. Herr von Beust continued in a louder voice:--

"Now, sire, the heir of that prince who was true to your great predecessor in his misfortunes[2] is in danger of losing those possessions of his house that he still retains; King John, who has always been your majesty's sincere friend, is in danger of being driven from the inheritance of his forefathers: and not he, sire, I, his servant--who need not like himself regard royal delicacy of feeling--I ask your majesty, will the heir of the power, the glory, and the name of that great Titan, silently suffer the descendant of his last and truest friend, his friend in need and danger, to be dethroned and banished?"

Herr von Beust ceased and gazed in breathless anxiety at the emperor.

Napoleon raised his head. His eyes were open. His pupils shone large and clear in dazzling brightness, a peculiar expression of pride and dignity was on his brow, a soft melancholy smile upon his lips.

"Sir," he said, in a low, metallic voice, "the friends of my uncle are my friends, to the third and fourth generation, and no prince shall repent having stood by the emperor's side in misfortune whilst I grasp the sword of France! You have saved Saxony," he added, with his gracious smile. "Tell the king your master that he shall return to his dwelling and his kingdom. I give you my word as an emperor."

With a movement in which the dignity of the sovereign was combined with the graceful courtesy of the man of the world, he held out his hand to Herr von Beust.

He seized it with veneration, whilst he rose quickly and exclaimed,--

"If the spirit of the great emperor can look down upon earth, sire, at this moment he must smile, well pleased, upon your majesty. You prove that his friendship still weighs heavily in the scale of the fate of Europe."

A short pause ensued. The emperor was thoughtful. Beust had again seated himself, and waited.

"You believe, then," said the emperor at last, "that success is impossible for Austria?"

"I have urged them strongly in Vienna," said von Beust, sighing, "to do all that they can--to make the utmost exertions, but I fear it will be in vain. The state machinery of Austria has grown rusty, and it would be hard even for a master spirit to set it in motion. The master spirit is not there, and," he added sadly, "is no longer to be found in the home of Kaunitz and Metternich."

"Then he must be imported," said the emperor.

The eyes of the Saxon minister, full of surprise and admiration, were fixed enquiringly upon the emperor's face, which had resumed its usual calm and reserved expression.

"Do you believe," said Napoleon, "that it would be impossible to regenerate Austria if the master spirit who is wanted were found?"

"Impossible!" cried von Beust; "certainly not. Austria has immense interior power, only the nerve is wanting to move it."

"You have during your political life thought out so much, and with such great success," said the emperor kindly, with a slight inclination of the head, "that you must have considered how best this slumbering power might be aroused--inspired with life?"

A sudden brilliancy shone in the eyes of Herr von Beust.

"Sire," he said with animation, "the first and deepest cause of Austria's weakness lies in this--her own strength binds her, one half of the monarchy watches the other half, and holds it in check. Hungary, with her great military power, with her rich, inexhaustible productiveness, lies dead; and instead of inspiring her with life, Vienna carefully excludes all political life from that country. In this crisis, for example, Hungary alone could save all that is lost; but they will not speak the inspiring word, for this word is, 'Freedom and National Independence;' and at this word all the dusty old acts in the state repositories tremble, and the dusty men tremble still more! And in the interior of the monarchy, in Austria itself, a stiff bureaucracy represses every sign of life amongst the people; and where the people do not feel, do not think, do not co-operate in public life, they are incapable of making great sacrifices and heroic efforts to uphold and to save the state. Oh!" he went on, with still greater animation, "if Austria could arise in renewed life, if her rich powers could be developed and strengthened by natural movement, then all would be won back for Austria and for Germany. If Austria would maintain her moral place in Germany, if she would undertake the sphere of intellectual progress, and through this progress allow her material power to arise afresh, then--and not too late--the day would come when this defeat would be brilliantly avenged. The formulary to obtain this is simple, it is this: freedom and independence for Hungary; freedom and public life for the whole monarchy, the reform of the government, and the reform of the army! But to adopt and carry out this formulary," he added, with a melancholy smile, and a slight bend of the head, "a genius and a will is needed, such as your majesty possesses."

"You flatter," said the emperor, smiling, and slightly raising his finger. "At this moment I learn----After the completion of these events, you will perhaps not continue minister of Saxony?" he then said.

"I shall remain at my king's side during the present crisis," said Herr von Beust. "But then, I think an unsuccessful statesman had better vanish from the stage."

"Or," said the emperor, "try his powers in a wider sphere than that whose narrow boundaries have denied him success."

He rose.

Beust stood up, and seized his hat.

"I hope," said the emperor, "that your views on the regeneration of Austria may some day be brought to life. In any case, I beg you will remember that you have a friend here, and that the interests of France and Austria are one in encouraging the free development of the German nation, and guaranteeing its national life. Greet your king from me, and ask him to trust to my word."

With great emotion, Herr von Beust seized the emperor's proffered hand.

"Thanks, sire, my warmest thanks," he cried. "Whatever the future may bring forth, I shall never forget this hour."

And bowing deeply, he left the cabinet.

The emperor called Piétri.

"Is Klindworth there?" he asked.

"At your command, sire."

"I beg him to come to me."

The states-chancellor appeared.

The emperor advanced towards him with a smile.

"You are right," he said; "the physician is found who can heal the sickness of Austria."

Klindworth bowed.

"I knew," he said, "that your majesty would agree with me."

"Try to have the treatment of the case confided to him. You may rely upon my entire support."

He thought deeply.

"And tell the emperor," he then said, "that I will do all in my power to assist him, as energetically as circumstances permit. Material help, however, Austria must gain from herself and from the regeneration of her resources."

"I understand perfectly, sire," said Klindworth.

"Keep me *au fait* as to Herr von Beust."

Klindworth bowed.

"May I return?" he asked.

"You must set to work at once," said the emperor, "for your task is not an easy one. *Au revoir:*" and he made a friendly movement with his hand.

Klindworth vanished behind the portière.

"The cards are shuffled more and more," said the emperor, as he sank back comfortably into his arm-chair; "and it is only needful to hold them with a strong hand, and to look firmly at them, to rule the game. It will do," he added, supporting his head on his hand, "and at the same time a wide perspective is opened for the future. If Austria can truly arise in renewed life--Italy enclosed on both sides--the alliance is given--Hungary--Poland holds Russia in check----"

His eyes shone.

"Well," he said, with a slight smile, "we will wait, in waiting lies my strength. But a little help prepared beforehand may be useful. Above all things, I must not forget Saxony."

He stood up, and called Piétri.

"Drive to Drouyn de Lhuys," he said, "and desire him, in the instructions to Benedetti, to give him distinct orders to forbid the annexation of Saxony in the most decided manner--in the most decided manner," he repeated with emphasis.

"At your command, sire."

"And," asked the emperor, "do you know where General Türr is at this moment?"

"With the army in Italy," replied Piétri; "but I can ascertain precisely immediately."

"Write to him," said the emperor. "No," interrupting himself, "send a confidential person. I want to beg him to come here at once."

Piétri bowed.

"Through him," said the emperor, speaking half to himself, "I shall keep my hand a little in Turin and Pesth; that may be important."

"Has your majesty any other commands?" asked Piétri.

"No, I thank you," said the emperor; and his private secretary withdrew. Napoleon leant back comfortably in his arm-chair, and carefully rolling a fresh cigarette, smoked thick clouds, lost in deep thought.

CHAPTER XIX.

BISMARCK'S DIPLOMACY.

The King of Prussia had taken up his head-quarters in the old castle belonging to the Princes of Dietrichstein at Nickolsburg. A brilliant and changing picture was displayed in this little town, which from its quiet seclusion seemed scarcely destined to become the centre of events so important in the history of the world.

The king's guard kept watch before the castle, the troops quartered in the little town moved about the streets in changing groups, marching columns pushed in between, artillery rattled over the rough pavement, the varied sounds of the bivouac echoed from without; and all around there was life and movement.

The inhabitants stood shyly before the doors, and at the windows which they had opened again. The fear of the enemy oppressed them, but it began to be mingled with confidence; these troops belonging to the foe were not so fearful as they had imagined. Here and there a Prussian soldier was seen in his weather-stained uniform, with his great wild beard, talking to a group of peasants who had been driven into the town for shelter from the burned and wasted villages; he was giving the shy and frightened children bread or other food, or goodnaturedly offering to some weak old man, some sick or weary woman, an invigorating sip from his flask.

War was here displayed in all its brilliance, in all its dazzling grandeur; the remembrance of long days and quiet years of peace filling in the background of the picture. War was here in all its horror, destroying in one frightful moment the happiness of years, and amidst the clash of national rights and interests, unchaining the savage instincts of human nature; but here too bloomed the noblest and purest flowers of heroism and self-sacrifice.

If the good-natured cordiality of the enemy's soldiers had done much to restore the confidence of the inhabitants, it was still more confirmed by a rumour passing from mouth to mouth, that negotiations for peace had commenced. Amongst the generals and staff officers who hurried in and out of the castle, diplomatists were seen in civilian dress; it was known that the French ambassador had arrived, and that after a short reception he had travelled on to Vienna. An armistice of five days had been concluded, and peace hovered in the air, longed for by none more ardently and sincerely than by the unhappy inhabitants of the countries where the bloody drama of war was being enacted.

In the midst of all this noise, of these echoing voices, of all these signals from drums and trumpets, sat the Prussian minister-president, Count Bismarck, in the spacious room in which he was quartered.

In the middle of the room stood a table covered with a dark green cloth, and piled with heaps of letters and papers. On the floor lay opened and torn envelopes in wild confusion. A large map of the country lay spread out upon the table, and before it sat the minister-president on a plain rush-bottomed chair; on a small table beside him stood a bottle of bright golden Bohemian beer and a large glass. The window was open and let in the fresh morning air.

Count Bismarck wore the uniform of a major of his cuirassier regiment comfortably unbuttoned, long riding boots, and his sword at his side.

Baron von Keudell sat opposite to him in the uniform of the Landwehr cavalry; he was occupied in looking through some letters.

"Benedetti is long in coming," said the minister, looking up from the map, in the contemplation of which he had been engrossed for some time; "they must still be very hopeful in Vienna, or perhaps they wish to play a double game! Well! they shall not keep us halted here much longer!" he cried vehemently, filling his glass and emptying it at a single draught, "standing still here can only injure our position. Though slow, like everything else in Austria, the army of the south is advancing nearer and nearer, the cholera too begins to be troublesome. I regret," he said, after a short silence, "that the king with his usual moderation gave up the entry into Vienna; there was nothing to stop us, and Austrian arrogance might have been humbled in the capital itself. Well! if they do not soon conclude peace, I hope the patience of our most gracious sovereign will be exhausted!"

"Is there a despatch from St. Petersburg?" he inquired of Keudell, suddenly breaking off his reflections.

"I have just opened a despatch from Count Redern, your excellency," said Herr von Keudell.

"Give it to me," cried Count Bismarck; and with a hasty movement he snatched the paper Herr von Keudell handed him across the table.

He read it attentively, and the deep silence within the room, where the breathing of the two men could be plainly heard, made a curious contrast to the confused noise from without.

The count threw the writing on the table.

"It is so," he cried, "a cloud is arising which may cause us painful embarrassment. Will they do anything there?" he said, half speaking to himself; "will their displeasure lead to action? I think not; but still it is very disagreeable. If Austria finds any point of support, she will apply every lever. St. Petersburg will do nothing for the sake of Austria; but the necessary alterations in Germany, and this French mediation with its plans in the background--the situation is difficult enough, and it will probably give us as much trouble to tear asunder this spider's web of diplomatic threads as it did to carry the Austrian lines. At all events this Russian cloud must be dispersed for the present and the future! For the future will bring us plenty to do," he said thoughtfully.

He stood up and paced the room with long strides, thinking deeply and sometimes moving his lips. The working of his features showed the mighty struggle of the labouring thoughts that oppressed him.

At last the force of his will appeared to have brought these contradictory ideas to order and peace. He gave a sigh of satisfaction, and walking to the window inhaled long draughts of the fresh air, widely expanding his broad, powerful chest.

A secretary of foreign affairs entered.

The count turned towards him.

"The Bavarian minister von der Pfordten has arrived, and requests an interview with your excellency. Here is his letter."

Count Bismarck hastily seized the small sealed note, opened it and read the short contents.

"They all come," he said, with a proud look, "all these mighty hunters, who had already divided the bear's skin, and now feel his claws. But they shall not escape from them so easily. Besides, I do not yet see my way clearly. Tell Herr von der Pfordten," he called out to the secretary who was waiting, "that you have given me his letter, and that I will send him my answer."

The secretary withdrew.

A few minutes afterwards he returned and said:

"The French ambassador!"

"Ah!" exclaimed Count Bismarck.

"Have the goodness, dear Keudell," said Bismarck, after a moment's thought, "to go to Herr von der Pfordten, and to tell him that I cannot receive the Bavarian minister, as we are still at war with his country, but that personally I shall be glad to see him, and to have an ex-official conversation with him, and that I will soon appoint an hour for that purpose."

Herr von Keudell bowed and went out.

A moment afterwards, at a sign from Bismarck, the secretary opened the door for the French ambassador.

Count Bismarck's expression had completely changed. Calm repose and courtesy were in his face. He stepped forwards to receive the representative of the Emperor Napoleon, and shook hands with him.

Monsieur Benedetti presented a remarkable contrast to the powerful form and firm soldier-like bearing of the Prussian minister. He was somewhat past fifty, his thin hair had receded from his forehead, and only sparingly covered the upper part of his head. His smooth beardless face was one of those physiognomies whose age it is difficult to discover, as when young they look older, when old, younger, than they really are. It would have been difficult to say what characteristic, what individuality, such features could express, nothing was seen beyond a calm expression of receptive and intelligent sensibility to every impression; what lay behind this gentle courteous exterior it was impossible to discover. His eyes were bright and candid, apparently careless and indifferent, it was only by the rapid and keen glance with which he occasionally took in every circumstance around him, that he betrayed the lively interest that really actuated him. His face told nothing, expressed nothing, and yet one perceived involuntarily that behind this nothing lay something, carefully concealed.

He was of middle height, and the bearing of his slender figure was elegant, in his movements he was as animated as an Italian, as pliant and elastic as an Oriental, his light summer clothes were extremely simple, but notwithstanding the journey from which he had just returned, they were of spotless freshness.

"I have been expecting you with impatience," said Count Bismarck, fixing his penetrating steel-grey eyes upon the ambassador's calm face. "What did you find in Vienna? do you bring peace?"

"At least I bring the beginning. I bring the acceptance of the preliminaries as proposed by the emperor."

"Ah! they decided thus in Vienna?" cried Count Bismarck.

"I have had a difficult job," said Benedetti, "for it was far from easy to gain Austria's consent."

Count Bismarck shrugged his shoulders.

"What can they hope for?" he cried; "do they prefer to await us in Vienna?"

"They hope much from the southern army, from a great military rising in Hungary," said the ambassador.

"Perhaps too for a new John Sobieski?" asked Bismarck, with a slight smile.

"And I must really own," continued Benedetti calmly, "that I was not in a position to deny the justice of these hopes."

Count Bismarck looked at him amazed and enquiringly.

"Two-thirds of the southern army," said Benedetti, "stand in the immediate vicinity of Vienna, the Prater is turned into a bivouac, and the fortified camp at Floridsdorf could make a strong resistance; the troops of the southern army are full of confidence from recent victory, and are

inspired with the best dispositions, the Arch-Duke Albert is a general of great determination, and the chief of his general staff, Lieutenant Field-Marshal von John, an officer of fine and quick intelligence."

Count Bismarck listened in silence. A scarcely perceptible smile played round his lips.

"And Hungary?" he asked negligently.

"Negotiations have been carried on with Count Andrassy and the Deak party, and if they will but grant a self-constituted government, and agree to the arming of the Honveds, a mighty rising may be expected in Hungary."

"*If* they grant it," said Count Bismarck. "Hungary has been often deceived, besides our troops have been before Presburg ever since the battle of Blumenau, and have only *not* taken it on account of the armistice. The key of Hungary is in our hands."

"They are persuaded in Vienna," proceeded Benedetti, "that the Prussian army has suffered greatly in the various engagements, and also from sickness."

"We suffer most from standing still," cried Bismarck vehemently.

"For all these reasons," said the ambassador quietly, "it was not easy to gain Austria's consent to the peace programme drawn up by my sovereign. It was very hard to the emperor Francis Joseph to agree to the exclusion of Austria from Germany. At last he yielded to the urgent representations I made in the name of the emperor, and that he might no longer expose Austria to the chances and burdens of war, and no longer endanger the peace of Europe, the emperor of Austria at last accepted the programme."

Count Bismarck bit his moustache.

"This programme is now definite, with the consent of Austria?" he asked. He invited the ambassador to be seated by a movement of the hand, and took a chair opposite to him.

"Nothing has been altered," replied Monsieur Benedetti, "the integrity of Austria, but its exclusion from Germany as newly constituted; the formation of a North German Union under the military leadership of Prussia; the right of the southern states to form an independent confederated union, but the maintenance of a national connexion between North and South Germany, which connexion is to be determined by a free and general consent of the various states."

As the ambassador slowly and distinctly repeated this programme Count Bismarck accompanied each phrase with a quick nod of approval, whilst he slightly clasped the fingers of both his hands.

"Those are the rules laid down for the position of Austria, and for our own position in Germany," he said, "as we before agreed. As the foundation of the negotiations, since Austria accepts them, they suffice, but as the basis of a definite peace a further understanding is needful. Peace with Austria does not affect and must not affect our proceedings with regard to the other German states with whom we are at war."

"Austria leaves each of these states to conclude its own peace," said Benedetti.

"To conclude peace!" cried Count Bismarck. "These governments would be willing enough to conclude peace now, and on the first opportunity to begin the game afresh!"

After a short pause he continued in a calm voice:

"Some days ago the king imparted to the emperor your sovereign by telegraph, that a certain addition to the power of Prussia through acquisitions of territory had become needful. You have lived among us," he continued, "and you well know the stake Prussia had placed on this war, the sacrifices that have been made to carry it on, the wounds which war has inflicted on the country. The Prussian people expect--demand, a reward for their sacrifices, since victory has decided in our favour: they demand, and rightly, that the blood of Prussian soldiers, the sons of the people, shall not have been shed in vain, and that the state of things shall be definitely done away with, which always has caused and always would engender strife. Those vexatious boundaries which make Prussia's geographical position, and her unity, so difficult, which neither natural nor political considerations permit, must be removed--removed for ever. Prussia, rightly to fulfil and powerfully to carry out the position assigned to her in Germany by the peace basis, must before all things be thoroughly strong and more homogeneous. The incorporation of Hanover, Hesse, and Saxony is needful, firmly and indissolubly to connect the two halves of the monarchy, and to secure it against Austria in a military point of view."

Not a feature of the ambassador's smooth face changed.

"I find it only natural that the Prussian people should wish to pluck the richest fruits of a war in which *their whole force*," he said, with a slight emphasis, "was sent to the battle-field. But the wishes of the people are often different from the views of princes and governments. You are as

much convinced as myself," he continued, in a lower voice, "that every period has its peculiar political maxims and views. To-day, for example, they are different from what they were in the time of Frederick the Great; it was then held right to keep what you had taken. At that time interests and demands were not so moderate as at present."

A slight frown appeared between Count Bismarck's eyebrows.

"Well," he said, with a smile, and in a calm voice, "I think Frederick the Great found it not so easy to keep what he had taken; that political maxim was practised on a large scale in the beginning of the present century by Napoleon I."

"That was the great fault of the founder of our imperial dynasty," said Benedetti, "at last it armed the whole of Europe against him; I am able to say this candidly, when I reflect on the wise moderation the emperor, my sovereign, has ever shown, when at the head of victorious armies, and the care with which he has avoided this mistake of his great uncle."

Count Bismarck looked for a moment thoughtfully before him.

"You know," he then said, with perfect frankness, "how important I deem our good understanding with France; the emperor knows it too, and particularly at this moment I would on no account even *appear* to have neglected the wishes or interests of France, or to have refused her advice. The good understanding of Prussia,--of Germany with France, the adjustment of the political requirements and necessities on both sides, the peaceful and friendly intercourse between the two countries, is in my opinion the first condition, for the peace and balance of power in Europe. Let us then discuss the situation calmly and with perfect candour. I can only repeat to you," he said, raising his piercing eyes and fixing them upon the ambassador, "that the increase of Prussia's power by the acquisition of the hostile states appears to me an absolute necessity. Do you think," he proceeded, "that the emperor will deem it needful for the interests of France to oppose these acquisitions?"

Benedetti hesitated for a moment before answering this direct question.

"The emperor has already," he then said, "recognized the necessity of arrangements for uniting the two separate halves of the Prussian monarchy, and this necessity I feel convinced he would now be less inclined than ever to deny. Whether the complete annexation of German states, whose rights were guaranteed by the rest of Europe, is absolutely needful, must be a matter of opinion, but I do not think the emperor will have any other view than for you to carry out your own ideas, and if he does not share, he will not contradict them."

Count Bismarck bowed his head approvingly.

"As to Saxony," added Benedetti.

The Prussian minister looked at him anxiously and expectantly.

"With regard to Saxony," said the ambassador, "I found a strong determination in Austria to maintain its territorial integrity; it is held to be a duty to a confederate who has fought with Austria on the same battlefields."

Bismarck bit his lip.

"I believe," added Benedetti, "that the Emperor Francis Joseph is resolved to carry on the war to the last gasp rather than yield to this condition."

Count Bismarck was silent for a moment.

"And how does France, how does the emperor Napoleon regard this resolution on the part of--Austria?" he asked, with a firm look and a slight smile.

"I believe I may affirm that the emperor entirely shares the wishes of Austria with regard to Saxony," said Benedetti.

"Seriously?" asked Count Bismarck.

"Most seriously," replied the ambassador calmly.

"Very good!" exclaimed Bismarck; "the incorporation of Saxony is not so absolute a necessity to us, as those states are which divide our territory. I will inform the king of the wishes of the Emperor Napoleon, and Austria, with regard to Saxony, and I will support them. Saxony will of course be added to the independent states in the North German Union."

"That is an interior affair belonging to the new organization of Germany," said Benedetti, "in which the emperor has not the slightest wish to intermeddle."

"So then the programme as you have just repeated it may be looked upon as a definite peace basis, with this addition, that Austria agrees to accept all the alterations in North Germany which the territorial acquisitions may necessitate, namely, the incorporation of Hanover, Hesse-Cassel, Nassau, and Frankfort."

The calm face of the ambassador showed some surprise.

"I do not remember that we ever spoke of Nassau and Frankfort."

"They are needful for the complete adjustment of our frontier, that is to say, if we give up Saxony," said Bismarck.

Benedetti was silent.

"Negotiations for peace may then be begun upon this basis?" asked the Prussian minister, with an enquiring glance at the ambassador.

"I see no further difficulty," said the latter, "and," he added, without any particular emphasis, "the adjustment of the interests of new Germany and of France will be easily arranged through the spirit of moderation and *prévenance* shown by our emperor, and with which you too and your sovereign have proved you are inspired."

Count Bismarck gazed deeply and searchingly into the expressionless eyes of the French diplomatist; he appeared carefully to weigh every word.

"And how do you think that these interests will be affected by the new arrangements? how do you think they can be adjusted?"

Benedetti leant back a little in his chair, and then said,--

"I think you will acknowledge the readiness with which the Emperor Napoleon has accepted the incorporation of the German states by Prussia, although--I must repeat this--it was not in accordance with his ideas, and perhaps might occasion serious misconceptions in other European cabinets."

"What power would find anything against it," cried Bismarck, "if France agreed?"

"England, perhaps, with regard to Hanover," said Benedetti.

Bismarck shrugged his shoulders.

"Perhaps Russia," continued the ambassador. "The Emperor Alexander, with his views on legitimacy and monarchical rights, would hardly approve of the disinheriting of dynasties."

Count Bismarck was silent.

"I mention this only incidentally," said Benedetti; "nevertheless I think it is greatly to your interest to act completely in accordance with France, and I believe that you will not be unwilling to acknowledge the Emperor Napoleon's friendship, nor to own that on our side certain territorial modifications are needful on our frontier, to maintain the balance of power and thus cement a lasting friendship."

The slight cloud which at the ambassador's first words had appeared on Count Bismarck's brow, not unobserved by the speaker, quickly vanished; his countenance assumed calm indifference, and with obliging courtesy he asked,--

"And can you impart to me the emperor's views as to these territorial modifications?"

"*My* views," replied Benedetti, with a slight emphasis, "are, that in consequence of the important alterations in Germany it will be needful for France, entirely from military considerations, to demand certain compensations. You will not deny that the boundaries given to France in 1815 are neither in accordance with her natural nor her military requirements, nor that the restoration of the frontier given in 1814 by victorious Europe to defeated France, is a moderate and just demand from a powerful France who has just consented in so ready and friendly a spirit to immense accessions of strength for victorious Prussia."

Count Bismarck remained silent, and the courteous, smiling expression of his face did not change for a moment.

"You will," pursued Benedetti, "find it only reasonable that the emperor should wish to include in the extended or rather restored frontier of France, Luxembourg, which from its natural position and language belongs to as, and which in a military point of view is so needful, to secure us from the increased power of Germany threatening us from the Rhine fortresses. You must forgive me," he said, smiling; "we must remember that a time may come when the respective governments of Paris and Berlin are not so peaceful and friendly as at present. These arrangements will not be difficult; the King of Holland, who cannot set great store upon this loosely-bound province, will be doubtless willing to part with it for an indemnification."

Still Count Bismarck was silent, smiling, and cheerful.

"Finally," said Benedetti--Count Bismarck raised his head and listened attentively--"finally, as a key to her defensive position, France must demand--I speak of possible disputes, doubtless far distant--France must demand possession of Mayence."

The count's eyes flashed. He rose quickly and drew himself up to his full height, his gigantic form panting with indignation. Benedetti slowly followed his example.

"I would rather vanish for ever from the political arena," cried the Prussian minister, "than yield Mayence."

He paced the room with hasty strides.

Benedetti stood motionless. His calm eyes followed the count's vehement movements.

"If my views," he said, as if simply continuing the conversation, "do not accord with yours, we----"

Bismarck had turned his face to the window for a moment, and had pressed his lips together as if with a violent struggle.

"We shall certainly understand one another perfectly if we discuss the subject more fully," he said, in his calmest and most courteous tone, as he turned again towards Benedetti with completely regained self-command. His face expressed only politeness and friendship.

"But we should not anticipate these discussions just now," he continued. "Have you instructions to express these wishes in the emperor's name, and to demand an answer, or do they in any way bear upon our negotiations for peace with Austria?"

"I had the honour," said Monsieur Benedetti, "of remarking at the beginning of this conversation that I was expressing *my own* ideas; I have no instructions to demand anything, nor to request a distinct answer; still less does this conversation in any way affect the negotiations for peace."

"Let us agree then," replied Bismarck, "to defer this conversation until we have finished what lies immediately before us, and until after the peace with Austria is signed. You fully comprehend that deep and calm reflection is needed completely to satisfy the interests of both sides; and then," he added, smiling, "it is not easy to discuss the equivalent compensation of objects not yet in our hands. I do not doubt that we shall perfectly understand each other when we discuss the matter in earnest, and when you have received definite instructions. You know how much I desire, not only the present friendship of France, but that the feeling should be enduring, and so firmly consolidated that the relations between France and Prussia may form the basis of a European peace. Everything then to be done at present is arranged?" he asked, after a short pause.

"Completely," replied Monsieur Benedetti.

"The Austrian plenipotentiaries--?"

"Will arrive to-morrow or the day after. I will rest a little after my fatiguing journey." And he seized his hat.

Count Bismarck held out his hand to him, and accompanied him to the door of the room.

Scarcely had the door closed behind the ambassador, before the expression of Bismarck's face changed completely. The courteous amiable smile vanished from his lips. Burning anger flashed from his eyes.

"They think they hold a good hand," he cried, "these skilful players; but they deceive themselves; they are mistaken in me--Germany shall not pay for her unity, like Italy, with her own flesh and blood; at least, not so long as I influence the fate of the nation. Let them advance to the Rhine, if it must be so, I will not retreat; the only concession I will make is, to go forwards slowly. I should not be sorry if they determined to fight," he cried with sparkling eyes; "I am ready to say once more, 'I dare it;' and this time the king would not hesitate and wait. Yet," he continued more calmly, "much has been gained already, and what has been gained should not be rashly risked; they think the game is in their hands,--well! I will shuffle the cards a little on my side."

He rang a small bell. An orderly entered.

"Find Herr von Keudell, and beg him to bring me Herr von der Pfordten."

The orderly withdrew.

Count Bismarck seated himself before the table covered with maps, and studied them attentively; sometimes he passed the fore-finger of his right hand over certain parts, sometimes his lips moved in a low whisper, and sometimes his eyes were thoughtfully raised to the ceiling.

After about a quarter of an hour, Herr von Keudell brought the Bavarian minister to the cabinet.

The full tall form of this statesman was bent, and showed signs of bodily weakness. His large gentle face, surrounded with dark hair, was pale and exhausted, his eyes gazed mournfully through the glasses of his spectacles.

Count Bismarck was standing perfectly upright, his features expressed icy coldness; with the stiffest military bearing, but with formal politeness, he advanced towards the Bavarian minister and returned his greeting. He then with an equally cold and courteous movement invited him to be seated on the chair Benedetti had just left, and placing himself opposite to him he waited for him to speak.

"I come," said Herr von der Pfordten, in a voice of some emotion, and in the southern dialect, "to prevent further bloodshed and misery from this war. The campaign is really decided, and decided in your favour, and Bavaria cannot hesitate to conclude a war, which," he said in a low voice, "it would, perhaps, have been better never to have commenced."

Count Bismarck looked at him severely for a moment with his hard clear eyes.

"Do you know," he said, "that I have a perfect right to treat you as a prisoner of war?"

Herr von der Pfordten started. For a moment he was speechless, gazing at the Prussian minister in amazement.

"Bavaria is at war with Prussia, negotiations are impossible," said Count Bismarck; "a Bavarian minister can only be a prisoner at the Prussian head-quarters,--intercourse can only be carried on by the bearer of a flag of truce."

Herr von der Pfordten sorrowfully bowed his head. "I am in your power," he said calmly, "and this proves how greatly I desire peace. What would you gain by arresting me?"

Count Bismarck was silent.

"I am amazed at your boldness in coming here," he said after a pause; "you prove indeed that you desire peace."

Herr von der Pfordten shook his head slightly.

"I fear," he said, "that my step has been in vain."

"A step in the right path is never in vain, even though it should be too late," said Count Bismarck, with a slight tone of friendship in his voice; "what a position might Bavaria have held, had you taken this step four weeks ago--if you had come to me four weeks ago in Berlin!"

"I held firmly to the German Confederation which had been sanctioned by all Europe," replied the Bavarian minister, "and I believed I was doing my duty towards Germany and Bavaria; I was wrong; the past has gone for ever; I come to speak to you of the future."

"The future lies in *our* hands," cried Count Bismarck. "Austria makes her own peace, and troubles herself neither about the Confederation, nor her allies."

"I know it," said Herr von der Pfordten faintly.

"Germany now sees," continued Bismarck, "where Austria has dragged her. I am especially sorry for Bavaria, for I always thought that Bavaria would have taken an important part in the national development of Germany, and, united with Prussia, would have stood at the head of the nation."

"If Bavaria took a false step under my guidance," said Herr von der Pfordten,--"and the result has shown it *was* a false step--let us now amend the fault, even though late. My decision is made. I have but *one* duty to fulfil, to make every effort to avert from my country and my young king the evil results of my fault. To fulfil this duty I am here, and because I expect and desire nothing for myself in the future, I believe I can the more freely and impartially discuss it with you, count."

Count Bismarck was silent for a moment, and his fingers tapped the table slightly.

"I am not in a position," he then said, "to speak as Prussian minister to the minister of Bavaria; the situation forbids it, the king's permission is wanting. But this hour shall not be unfruitful," he continued in a milder tone; "I will prove to you how much I personally regret that we could not understand each other, that we could not work together; your advice, your experience would have been so useful to Germany. Let us speak as Baron von der Pfordten and Count Bismarck, a Bavarian and a Prussian patriot, on the present position of affairs; perhaps," he continued laughingly, "both the Prussian and the Bavarian minister may learn something from us."

Herr von der Pfordten's face brightened up. He looked at the count through his spectacles with a happy expression.

"What do you think," said Bismarck, "will become of Bavaria? What can Prussia do with Bavaria?"

"I suppose," said Herr von der Pfordten, "that Prussia will have undivided authority in North Germany."

"Who can dispute it?" asked Count Bismarck.

"I may then remark that an annexation of South German territory, so entirely heterogeneous, would hardly be to Prussia's interest, and that it would be a greater advantage to come to an understanding on the future of Germany, with an independent and unweakened Bavaria."

"And on the first opportunity to find ourselves in fresh difficulties?" asked Count Bismarck.

"After the experience of this day--" began the Bavarian minister.

"My dear baron," interrupted Bismarck, "I will speak quite openly to you. The future belongs neither to you nor to me. Words and promises, however much in earnest, cannot be the foundation upon which the future peace and strength of Prussia and of Germany must rest. We must have guarantees. Prussia cannot again be exposed to the danger she has just overcome, nor again be called upon to make the sacrifice she has just made. Bavaria has been, very much to her own disadvantage, as I always knew, our foe. We must have full security that this cannot happen in the future. To attain this there are two ways."

Herr von der Pfordten listened anxiously.

"Either," proceeded Count Bismarck, "to take so much of your territory as will prevent Bavaria from being able to hurt us in the future----"

"Have you thought of the difficulties of assimilating Bavarian territory and the Bavarian people?" asked Herr von der Pfordten.

"They would be great," said Bismarck calmly, "I own it; but we should overcome them, and for the safety of Prussia I despise difficulties."

The Bavarian minister sighed.

"The complications that such a course would cause!" he said in a low voice, and with a penetrating glance at Bismarck's face.

Count Bismarck looked at him firmly.

"From whence are they to come?" he asked. "From Austria? In the quarter where complications might arise," he continued, looking proudly at the Bavarian minister, "they would not refuse a share in the spoil."

Von der Pfordten bowed his head.

"Let us not speak of it," said Bismarck. "We are Germans; let us manage the affairs of Germany without our neighbours."

"And the other way?" asked Herr von der Pfordten, with hesitation.

"The inner life of Bavaria is foreign to us," said Count Bismarck thoughtfully, "and we would rather not interfere with it. What Germany needs for strength and power--what Prussia needs for safety, is that the supreme direction of the national forces should be placed in the hands of the most powerful military state of the German nation--her natural leader in war. If Bavaria will acknowledge this national necessity--if, in short, she will agree, by a binding treaty, in the event of a national war, to give up the command of her army to the king of Prussia, the needful guarantee for Germany's defence and power, for Prussia's safety, will be obtained."

The face of the Bavarian minister cleared up more and more.

"The command of the army in a national war?" he asked.

"Of course, with certain conditions, which would make a common command, an incorporation of the Bavarian army with the Prussian forces, possible," said Count Bismarck.

"Without prejudice to the king's command of the army?" asked Herr von der Pfordten.

"I should consider any further curtailment of his powers unnecessary," replied the Count.

Herr von der Pfordten drew a deep breath.

"These, then, would be your conditions of peace?" he asked.

"Not the conditions of peace, but the preliminaries of peace," replied Bismarck.

"How am I to understand this?" asked von der Pfordten.

"Very easily," said the Count. "If a treaty such as I have sketched, and which I will immediately have drawn out in detail by the military department, is concluded--a treaty which, for the present, had better be kept secret--yes," he added thoughtfully, "it had much better be kept secret; it will save you so much trouble from the anti-Prussian party--if such a treaty, I say, is agreed to, peace can easily be concluded. This treaty would be a guarantee to Prussia that Bavaria would really and uprightly labour with her at the work of national union, and that all the former faults in her policy were laid aside. With this guarantee we could easily negotiate peace. It would then be to

our interest to maintain Bavaria's power and complete independence in Germany. We shall then only have the expenses of the war to consider, which we shall expect to have paid in full, and perhaps some very unimportant cession of territory, for the sake of the symmetry of our frontier."

"Count," said Herr von der Pfordten, with emotion, "I thank you. You have shown me a way by which, with honour to herself and benefit to Germany, Bavaria may extricate herself from her present melancholy position. I thank you in the name of my king."

"I feel the deepest sympathy for your young king," said Count Bismarck, "and I hope that Bavaria, as Prussia's ally, may yet take the place, which hitherto *she would not* take. But, my dear baron," he added, rising, "we must not forget that this is only a conversation between two private individuals. Hasten back to your king, and bring his consent to this treaty as soon as possible. When it is signed, hostilities will cease, and I promise the negotiations for peace shall not be difficult nor prolonged; and," he added courteously, "be assured I do not wish you to retire from public life."

"I know," said Herr von der Pfordten, "what I must do. A new hand must guide Bavaria in new paths; but my good wishes will be as hearty for new Germany as they ever have been for the old."

"One thing more," said Bismarck. "Since we have come to so good an understanding, you might do your allies in Stuttgardt and Darmstadt a service--perhaps to me also; for I wish to treat with Würtemberg and Hesse in a conciliatory spirit. If these courts are willing to conclude a treaty similar to that of which we have been speaking, I think a reconciliation would be possible. If Herr von Varnbüler and Herr von Dalwigk should come here empowered to conclude such a treaty, the secrecy of which I willingly promise, they would be welcome, and would find moderate and easy terms of peace."

"I do not doubt that they will shortly appear," said Herr von der Pfordten.

"Now, my dear baron, hasten away," cried Count Bismarck, "and return quickly, and so act that Count Bismarck may soon welcome the Bavarian minister fully empowered to conclude peace."

He held out his hand to Herr von der Pfordten, who pressed it heartily and with much feeling, and he accompanied him to the door.

In the ante-room they found von Keudell, and Bismarck begged him to facilitate the Bavarian minister's journey as much as possible.

When Count Bismarck returned to his room, he rubbed his hands with satisfaction, whilst he paced the room with long strides.

"So, messieurs in Paris!" he cried with a laugh, "you wish to split up and divide Germany, and help yourselves to compensation. The skilful engineers are blown up with their own mine. And their compensation? Let them flatter themselves with that hope a little longer. Now to the king!"

He buttoned up his uniform, took his military cap, and left the room to go to King William's quarters.

In the ante-room he saw an elderly gentleman, with grey hair and a grey beard, in the uniform of a Hanoverian equerry. A Prussian officer had brought him, and now approached the president minister, saying:--

"Lieutenant-Colonel von Heimbruch, the king of Hanover's equerry, wishes to speak to your excellency. I have brought him here, and was about to announce him."

Bismarck turned towards von Heimbruch, touched his cap slightly with his hand, and looked at him inquiringly.

The colonel approached him, and said:

"His majesty the king, my most gracious master, arrived in Vienna a short time ago, and, as negotiations for peace have begun, he sends me to his majesty the King of Prussia with a letter. At the same time, Count Platen sends this note to your excellency."

He handed the Prussian minister a sealed letter.

He opened it, and read through the contents quickly.

He turned gravely to Colonel von Heimbruch.

"Will you have the goodness to wait for me here. I am going to his majesty, and I shall shortly return."

With a military salute he walked on.

In the king's ante-room there were several generals and other officers. They all rose as Count Bismarck entered and saluted the generals.

The equerry on duty, Baron von Loë, advanced towards the minister president.

"Is his majesty alone?" asked Count Bismarck.

"General von Moltke is with the king," replied Baron von Loë, "but his majesty commanded me to announce your excellency at once."

He entered the king's cabinet, after knocking at the door, and returned almost immediately to open it to the president.

King William stood before a large table, spread over with maps, on which long arrows of various colours marked the position of the armies. He wore a campaigning overcoat, the Iron Cross in his button-hole, and the Order of Merit around his neck.

The king's eyes were attentively following the lines which General von Moltke drew in the air above the map with the pencil in his hand, sometimes pointing out a line here, sometimes there, for the elucidation of his dispositions. The tall, slender form of the general was bent slightly forwards as he gazed at the maps, his calm face, with its grave and noble features, recalling Sharnhorst's portraits, was somewhat animated, whilst he unfolded his ideas to the king, who listened in silence, from time to time signifying his approval by slightly bowing his head.

"I am glad you have come," cried the king, as his minister entered. "You can explain everything. Moltke has just told me that General Manteuffel has sent in word that Prince Karl of Bavaria proposes a week's suspension of hostilities, and that Würzburg, now threatened by Manteuffel, should be spared, since a treaty for the cessation of hostilities and negotiations for peace with Bavaria are about to commence immediately. General Manteuffel, who knows nothing of all this, does not refuse to treat, but demands that Würzburg should be given up to him in return for the suspension of arms, and he has sent to us to know what he is to do. What are these negotiations with Bavaria?"

Count Bismarck smiled.

"Herr von der Pfordten has just left me, your majesty," he replied.

"Ah!" cried the king; "do they beg for peace? What did you say?"

"Your majesty," replied Bismarck, "this is all part of the present situation upon which I am most desirous of consulting your majesty, and of receiving your supreme decision."

General von Moltke stuck his pencil into a large notebook which he held in his hand, and said:

"Your majesty has no further commands for me at this moment?"

"May I beg your majesty," said Count Bismarck quickly, "to ask the general to stay,--his opinion is important upon the question before us."

The king bowed approval. The general turned his grave eyes inquiringly upon the president.

"Your majesty," said Count Bismarck, "Benedetti has returned, and brings Austria's consent to the Emperor Napoleon's programme of peace."

"The negotiations can then begin?" asked the king.

"Without delay, your majesty," said Count Bismarck. "Benedetti," he proceeded, "wished to take great credit to himself for having persuaded Austria to accept the programme; he spoke of the great resistance they had made in Vienna, and described Austria's condition as by no means hopeless."

Moltke smiled.

"They can do nothing in Vienna," said the king calmly. "They intended to entice us to Olmütz, and there to hold us fast, to cover Vienna, and to prevail on Hungary to rise. All that is over. By Moltke's advice, we left them alone at Olmütz, and marched straight on. We are before Vienna, and it cannot hold out--the fortifications they have made at Floridsdorf cannot delay us; besides this, we hold the key of Hungary in our hands, and the Hungarians do not seem desirous of assisting Austria in her difficulties."

"I know all this, your majesty," said Count Bismarck; "I know too what these representations of Benedetti mean,--his tactics are to show us difficulties that we may feel the more indebted to France for her mediation, and more willing to pay a high price for it."

"And have they named their price?" asked the king, with increased attention.

"I told the ambassador plainly," replied Count Bismarck, "what your majesty had already telegraphed to the Emperor Napoleon from Brünn, on the 18th instant, that a large territorial acquisition would be needful to Prussia, and I pointed out those possessions of the enemy lying between the two halves of our kingdom and Saxony."

"And did he raise any objection?" asked the king.

"He used a few phrases about treaties and the balance of power in Europe, which, in the mouth of a diplomatist of the Napoleon dynasty, sounded rather absurd; but he made no real objection, except as regards Saxony."

"Well?" asked the king.

"As regards Saxony," continued Count Bismarck, "the Emperor Napoleon has, so Benedetti expressed it, identified himself unconditionally with the Austrian demand, that the territorial integrity of Saxony should be maintained."

The king looked on the ground thoughtfully.

"The truth is," added Bismarck, "in Paris they push Austria forward, but nevertheless they seriously mean to support Saxony. Your majesty must therefore decide; will you make a concession on this point or not?"

"What is your opinion?" asked the king.

"To abandon the incorporation of Saxony, your majesty, rather than complicate the present position. Saxony is not absolutely necessary to us, I believe, in a military point of view?" And he looked inquiringly at General von Moltke.

"If Saxony joins the military league of the North German Confederation, and does its duty in earnest----no!" said the general.

"King John's word is inviolable," said the king, with a warm light in his eyes, "so let the independence of Saxony be agreed to. I am very glad in this instance to be able to lighten the heavy consequences of war for a very estimable prince."

Count Bismarck bowed.

"France," he continued, "as well as Austria, accepts all the alterations of territory in North Germany; but now begin the extraordinary negotiations for compensation."

The king's countenance clouded.

"Were their demands stated?" he asked.

"No; but Benedetti pointed out very plainly what they would be; and I had guessed them beforehand," said Count Bismarck.

"What were they?" asked the king.

Calmly and smiling Count Bismarck replied--

"The frontier of 1814--Luxembourg and Mayence."

The king started as if from an electric shock. A dark red flush passed over General Moltke's pale, handsome face, and a sarcastic smile came to his lips.

"And what did you reply?" asked the king, closing his teeth firmly.

"I put off the negotiations on this point, until after the conclusion of peace with Austria; it was the more easy, as Benedetti only mentioned them as his own views. I was not, therefore, obliged to give a distinct answer."

"But you know," said the king, with a severe look and voice, "that I would never cede a foot of German soil."

"As surely," replied Count Bismarck, "as your majesty I hope is convinced, that my hand would never sign such a treaty! But," he added, "I thought it useless to make a breach and to have difficulties and embarrassments too soon. If France commenced a war now--"

"We should march to Paris," said General Moltke carelessly; "Napoleon has no army!"

"Count Goltz does not believe that," said the president-minister, "if I could only be sure; but at all events it is better to conclude a peace with Austria, and not to provoke discussions of compensations not yet officially demanded by France. When we have done here, those gentlemen in Paris shall get the answer I have prepared for them, and a little surprise into the bargain. I now come to Herr von der Pfordten, your majesty."

The king looked at him enquiringly.

"Your majesty recollects," said Count Bismarck, "the position which the peace programme gives to the South German states?"

"Certainly," said the king, "and this position has caused me great doubts for the future."

"The intention is plain," said Bismarck; "in Paris they wish to split Germany in two, and to hold one half in check with the other; in Vienna they wish to begin afresh the game they have now lost, at some future time. I hope they will find themselves mistaken. I offered von der Pfordten very easy terms of peace, provided Bavaria entered into a secret treaty accepting your majesty as commander-in-chief of her army in case of war."

The king's eyes sparkled.

"Then would Germany indeed be one!" he cried. "Did he accept these terms?"

"With thankfulness and joy," replied Count Bismarck, "and Würtemberg and Hesse will follow the example, he assures me. I must now request General Moltke to have the goodness to draw up the proposed military arrangement, so that when the Bavarian minister returns with the king's consent, everything may be settled as quickly as possible, and also for Würtemberg and Hesse. Until then General Manteuffel must avoid any definite explanation about the armistice, and produce a wholesome pressure. I hope," he said laughing; "the Emperor Napoleon will observe after peace has been concluded, that all the trumps in his well-shuffled game are in our hand, and then the compensation question shall also be settled."

"You see, Moltke," said the king smiling, and with a gracious look at the president, "these diplomatists are all alike, even when they wear uniform! But," he added gravely, "Benedetti must not speak to me about compensation; I should not be able to delay my answer!"

Count Bismarck bowed.

"I must, however, direct your majesty's attention," he said, "to another subject. The disposition of the Russian court is unfavourable, and I fear our new acquisitions will cause increased displeasure."

"I feared this," said the king.

"It is important," proceeded Count Bismarck, "that the sky should be clear in that quarter. We must paralyze the influence exerted against us, and call Russia's attention to the interest she has in preserving the friendship of Prussia and Germany, both now and in the future. It will be needful to send a skilful person to St. Petersburg. I will lay before your majesty a sketch of my views in this direction, and if you graciously approve, it will serve as the ambassador's instructions."

"Do so," said the king, with animation, "not only politically but personally I am most anxious to preserve the undisturbed friendship of Russia. I will send Manteuffel," he said after a little consideration, "he is quite the man for it, as soon as the war in Bavaria is ended."

Count Bismarck bowed in silence. He then said:

"Your majesty, a Hanoverian equerry has just arrived here with a letter from the king. He has brought me a note from Count Platen."

A sorrowful expression came into the king's face.

"What does he write?" he asked.

"The king acknowledges your majesty as the victor in Germany, and is ready to accept such terms of peace as your majesty will grant."

For a long time the king was silent.

"Oh!" he cried, "if I could but help him. Poor George! Could not a curtailed Hanover without military independence be permitted?"

Count Bismarck's eyes looked with icy calmness and complete firmness on the king's excited face.

"Your majesty has decided that the incorporation of Hanover is necessary for the safety and power of Prussia. What good would a sham monarchy, a simple principality do to the Guelphs? But to us, such a hiatus inhabited by a hostile population would be dangerous. Your majesty must remember what mischief the Hanoverians would have done us, had they retained Gablenz, or had the general staff ordered less incomprehensible marches. Such a danger must be rendered impossible for the future!"

"Queen Frederika was the sister of my mother," said the king in a voice that trembled slightly.

"I venerate the ties of royal blood that unite your majesty to King George," said Count Bismarck, "and I have personally the highest sympathy for that unhappy prince; but," he said, raising his voice, "your majesty's nearest and dearest relation is the Prussian people, whose blood has flowed on these battle-fields--the people of Frederick the Great, the people of 1813. Your majesty must pay them the price of their blood. Forgive me, your majesty, if I am bold when speaking in the name of your people. I know my words only express feelings your royal heart deeply and loudly echoes. If your majesty receives the king's letter," he added, "you bind your

hands, you commence negotiations, which ought not to be begun!"

The king sighed deeply.

"God is my witness," he said, "that I did all I could to avoid a breach with Hanover, and to save the king from the hard fate which now falls upon him. Believe me," he added, "my heart could make no greater sacrifice to Prussia, her greatness, and her calling in Germany, than in yielding to this necessity."

A moisture clouded the king's clear eyes.

"Decline to receive the letter!" he said with emotion, sorrowfully bending his head.

"God bless your majesty," cried Bismarck with kindling eyes, "for the sake of Prussia and of Germany!"

General von Moltke looked gravely at his royal commander with an expression of earnest love and admiration.

Silently the king motioned with his hand and turned to the window.

Count Bismarck and the general left the cabinet.

CHAPTER XX.

THE CRISIS.

Langensalza had grown very quiet after its days of storm and excitement. The Hanoverian army was disbanded, and had returned home. The Prussian troops had advanced upon other enemies in the south and west, and the little town was now as placid and still as it had been for long years before, until Fate chose it for the theatre of so bloody a struggle.

But although the streets were as quiet and monotonous as ever in the hot sunshine of midsummer, within the houses a quiet life went on of inexhaustible love and mercy, that love and mercy which the tempest of war always calls forth so abundantly, and which is so lovely a witness of the eternal and indestructible connection between man's heart and the God of unconquerable love, of inexhaustible compassion.

Many of the severely wounded Prussians and Hanoverians could not be moved, and numerous hospitals were formed. All the private houses had received the poor sacrifices of war, and from Prussia and Hanover, besides the sisters of mercy and deaconesses, numerous relatives of the wounded had arrived, to undertake the care of those they loved.

When the sun was setting, and the twilight brought the coolness of evening, many women and girls in dark, simple dresses, with grave faces, walked silently through the streets, hastily breathing in a little fresh air, to obtain strength to continue their work of loving self-sacrifice; and the looks of the inhabitants followed them with quiet sympathy, as they sat before their doors after their day's work was over, talking in whispers about one group after another as it passed.

Madame von Wendenstein, with her daughter and Helena, had been most kindly received into old Lohmeier's house, Margaret preparing two rooms in the well-to-do burgher house with every possible comfort, whilst the candidate found a lodging in a neighbouring hotel.

Trembling with anxiety, Madame von Wendenstein approached her son's bed, repressing by a powerful effort the convulsive sobs that threatened to choke her. The young lieutenant lay rigid and quiet, his low, regular breathing the only sign of life.

The mother took his hand, bent over him, and gently breathed a kiss upon his brow; and under the magnetic influence of a mother's kiss, the young man slowly opened his eyes, and gazed around with a vacant look. But then a happy ray of recognition animated the senseless eyes, a smile came to his lips, and the mother felt an almost imperceptible pressure on her fingers.

The old lady sank on her knees beside the bed, laid her head on her son's hand, and, in silent unspoken prayer, besought God to preserve this life, dearer to her than her own.

The two young girls stood behind Madame von Wendenstein. Helena's large burning eyes were fixed on the image of the man, now so weak and fragile, who had left her so fresh and strong. His sister concealed her tears with her handkerchief; but Helena's eyes were dry and bright, her pale features composed and motionless. She stood with folded hands, and her lips

trembled slightly.

Lieutenant von Wendenstein's widely-opened eyes fell on the young girl, when his mother sank down beside his bed. A gleam of happiness passed over his face, his eyes brightened with a look of delight, his lips opened slightly, but a hard, rattling breath came from his mouth, and a red foam appeared on his lips. His eyelids closed again, and the face lay deadly pale and rigid on the white pillow.

Then the surgeon arrived, and brought uncertain comfort, and a time commenced of unwearied watching--that quiet work, so difficult in its simplicity and on which so rich a blessing rests, which raises the heart so high above all earthly things, to the Fount of love, the Eternal Lord of human life and human fate. How easy it seems to sit in a comfortable chair, and watch the sleep of the sick; how small the trouble of laying a cooling bandage on a wound, of placing a nourishing drink, a composing medicine to the lips!

But who can weigh the anguish and anxiety with which the loving eye hangs on each movement of the eyelash, on each quiver of the lip, on every breath! The life of the sick may be endangered by a minute's sleep, a forgotten order. Oh! how great these small, unimportant services are through the long nights, when the seconds, wont to fly so quickly, roll heavily, drearily into the sea of eternity; how small and colourless all the changing brilliant doings of the outer world appear, compared with the quiet sick-room and its holy work of preserving a human life, and staying the Fates' cold hands, with their pitiless shears, from severing a tender thread, on which hang joy and hope, love and happiness, work and success!

And when recovery slowly, slowly approaches the bed of pain, like a tender spring flower coyly raising its head, ever threatened by the rough hand of a wintry death, who hesitatingly and unwillingly gives up his prey, and with his cold flakes strives to stifle the bloom so unweariedly tended day and night; how the loving heart bows down in humble thanksgiving before the Almighty, in whose hand human life is but a breath, which in a moment can fail, and which yet is so carefully preserved, and adorned with such rich blessing. How small appear human wishes, human will; how resignedly the heart learns to pray, "Lord, not my will, but Thine be done!" with what trust and faith the soul rises to the Father beyond the stars, who says, "Ask, and it shall be given you."

Madame von Wendenstein passed through all these phases of inner life beside the bed of her son; hoping and fearing, doubting and trusting, she always maintained her outward calmness, and performed all the duties of a nurse, assisted by the two young girls. Pale and quiet, Helena took her share of the work, her large, dreamy eyes, quickened by anxiety, watching every feature of the wounded man.

And hope had come, rejoicing every heart. The patient had passed through the first fever from the wound. The ball had been satisfactorily extracted; only one crisis more had to be feared--the flow of blood which had filled the deep wound; then there was only the recovery of strength to the much-shaken nervous system.

The most complete quiet was ordered by the surgeon; no loud sound must be permitted to reach the patient's ear; no question must be answered, and smiling lips and friendly glances must be the only language between the sufferer and his nurses.

And how expressive was this language!

What pure, warm light flowed from Helena's eyes when they rested on the pale face of the sleeper; how they hung on every breath, how thankfully were they raised above when the regular breathing told of soft and gentle sleep!

And when the sufferer opened his eyes, and saw those glances, what bright, expressive looks, though weak from illness, replied. How wonderful is it that the eye can express so much, that small circle which yet can comprehend and mirror back the firmament, with its stars, the everlasting mountains, and the boundless sea; what no words can utter, what the most glowing poetry cannot express, is all said by the eye, with its fine shades of varied expression; and above all by the eyes of the sick, because, banished from the changing and distracting pictures of the world, they have grown clearer and more transparent, revealing more plainly all that passes in the self-contained soul.

When the eyes of the wounded officer rested on the young girl, their deep eloquence telling whole volumes of poetry, recollections of the past, hopeful dreams for the future, her eyes fell, and a slight blush passed over her brow, and yet she raised them again, and her answer sparkled through a veil of tears.

Once when Helena offered him some cooling drink, his long, thin, white hand, with its dark blue veins, was stretched out towards her, she gave him hers, and he clasped it, and held it for a long time, and his eyes rested on her so thankfully, so enquiringly, so longingly, that, with a sudden crimson blush, she withdrew her hand; but her look had answered his, and, smiling, he closed his eyes, to dream again in light and happy slumber.

And often since then, with an imploring look, he had held out his hand, and she had given him hers,--and then her hand had been gently pressed to his lips, and a kiss had been breathed on it

with the hot breath of sickness, and again tremblingly she had withdrawn her hand, and again their eyes had met, and a happy smile had appeared upon her lips. And the dumb language between them had grown richer and clearer, and he had often opened his lips as if to make his feeble voice enforce the words his eyes had spoken; but with a sweet smile she had laid her finger on her lips, and his mouth had remained silent. At last his lips moved as she sat by his bed, and in the lowest whisper he said, "Dear Helena."

Then with a quick movement and a brilliant look she had held out her hand to him, and had not withdrawn it when he had pressed it long and fervently to his lips.

Madame von Wendenstein had seen much of this dumb language, and had understood it;--for what woman does not understand it? and what mother is indifferent when the heart of a beloved son turns with tender feelings to her who through the warfare of daily life may carry on a gentle woman's work, begun by the mother herself during the quiet years of childhood, that work of mild, consoling, gentle, forgiving love, without which man's strength is hard and unfruitful; without which man's work is without charm and graceful inspiration? Lost in these reflections she had often sat watching the movements of the two young hearts; whether it was pleasing to her, whether she saw with joy or grief that which was unfolded to her, and which she could not prevent, was hard to read in her pale, but calm and cheerful features; nevertheless she was deeply moved by the sight of this flower of love springing up from her son's bed of pain. And when one day the wounded man put out both hands, and taking her hand and Helena's at the same moment, silently implored that a mother's love might be given to his beloved, without speaking she passed her arms round Helena, and imprinted a kiss upon her brow; then her daughter came, and tenderly pressed Helena to her heart; and the sick man with a look of happiness folded his pale hands together in thankfulness.

Thus in the chamber of sickness a rich, eventful life went on, a link between two hearts was formed, so pure, so tender, so delicate, so holy, that it scarcely could have been thus perfected amidst the distractions of the world; no words had been exchanged, but all was understood--all knew what had sprung up on the border land that divides life from death; they knew it had taken root strongly, and would grow up in the future life. Thus God, whilst ruling the terrible tempests that convulsed the world, and bringing forth a new order of things from the mighty struggle of the nations of Germany--seized with a gentle, tender hand the inner life of these two human hearts, imprinting deep and silent feelings as indelibly, as the gigantic characters in which His eternal judgments were graven on the tablets of history.

Fritz Deyke, with his clear, true eyes, saw plainly enough what was going on beside the sick-bed of his lieutenant; he had not said a word, but he had managed to express that he understood, and was perfectly satisfied, by his respectful attentions and hearty sympathy to the pastor's daughter, and when he saw Helena sitting beside the lieutenant's bed, he looked with a smile from one to the other, and gave an approving nod, as if applauding some satisfactory thought.

Since the ladies' arrival he only came to and fro to the sick room, bringing everything needful, and at night he insisted on undertaking the last and most weary hours of watching, driving away the ladies with good-natured brusqueness.

But he was unwearied in assisting the pretty Margaret in all her occupations, in her endeavour to make their quiet monotonous life as agreeable as possible to her guests, and in her efforts to provide them with every comfort; then he had almost taken old Lohmeier's place out of doors, in the stable and garden, assisting everywhere with skilful hand, lightening much of the old man's work, and relieving him entirely of the rest. And in the evening he sat before the door with his host and his daughter; the father listened well pleased and smiled approvingly at his daughter when the sturdy son of Wendland, who had long before thrown aside his soldier's coat, told stories of his home; the old man gave a nod of satisfaction when it appeared from these histories that old Deyke was a well-to-do man, and that a rich inheritance must one day descend to his only son and heir.

The candidate came several times daily to see the ladies. Sometimes in a quiet manner he helped a little in nursing. Sometimes he spoke a few well-chosen words of comfort to the old lady. He went in and out of all the houses where there were sick and wounded, offered spiritual consolation, and was unwearied in assisting and directing in the hospitals, so that he won the general respect and gratitude of all the inhabitants of Langensalza, and all the relatives of the wounded. Madame von Wendenstein was full of his praise, and took every opportunity of showing her esteem and gratitude to the young clergyman.

Helena kept aloof from her cousin, and he did not seek her more than every-day intercourse required. But his eyes often rested on her with a strange expression, and an evil glance darted from them when he saw the young girl sitting beside the bed of the wounded officer, when her whole soul lay in her eyes, and the feelings of her heart were warmly reflected in her features; but no word, no sign betrayed that he guessed what had taken place in solitude and silence.

Late in the afternoon of one of the last days of July Madame von Wendenstein sat, with her daughter, in her room. The window was wide open to admit the cooler air that streamed in as the day declined. The door of the sick-room stood open, and Helena sat by the bedside, attentively watching the quiet slumberer as he lay with a smiling expression of happiness on his pale features.

The candidate sat with the ladies in his faultless black dress, a white necktie of dazzling purity carefully arranged around his neck, and his hair brushed smoothly down on each side of his forehead.

He spoke in a low voice as he told Madame von Wendenstein of the other sufferers whom he had visited.

"You have chosen a beautiful calling," said the old lady, smiling kindly on the young clergyman; "in such times as these especially, it must be a glorious satisfaction to bear the divine words of comfort to sufferers, and to raise and refresh their souls amidst bodily pain."

"But in such times as these," said the candidate, in a humble voice, casting his eyes to the ground, "I feel doubly what an unworthy instrument I am in the hand of Providence; when I speak to sufferers who have already stretched out their hands to eternity, who already behold the glories of a future world, I often ask myself whether I am worthy to tell them of their Lord, and I tremble beneath the weight of my office. But," he continued, folding his hands together, "the power of the divine word gives strength even to an unworthy instrument to work mightily; and I can say with joy that many a heart in health devoted to the world, has through my means, on the brink of eternity, received the faith, and obtained salvation."

"How many families will be grateful to you!" said Madame von Wendenstein warmly, as she held out her hand to him.

"They must not be grateful to me, but to Him who is mighty through me," replied the candidate, in a low voice, bowing his head.

And at the same moment he turned a quick glance towards the sick-room, in which a slight sound was heard.

The surgeon had entered softly; he approached the bed, watched his sleeping patient attentively for some little time, then he bent over him, gently removed the covering of the wound, and examined it carefully.

After a few minutes he joined the ladies in the other room.

Madame von Wendenstein looked at him anxiously. Helena followed him, and remained standing at the door.

"Everything is progressing excellently," said the surgeon; "and though I cannot say all danger is over, I can assure you that every day my hopes of a complete recovery increase."

Madame von Wendenstein thanked him for this good news with emotion, and Helena's eyes smiled through tears.

"For some time to come absolute quiet will be needful. Any shock to the much shaken nervous system might bring on fever of an inflammatory or typhoid character, and in the present state of weakness this would be fatal. The deep wound is still filled with blood; this can only be slowly absorbed and dispersed. Any sudden flow of blood from a violent effort might be fatal; therefore, I repeat it, absolute quiet is the first essential in the recovery of our patient, and nature will assist his youthful strength to repair the injury he has received. Nothing can be done beyond a slight compress to the wound, a little cooling medicine, and the maintenance of the strength by light nourishment. But now, ladies, I must exercise my medical authority upon you," he continued. "It is a long time since you have been in the open air, and to-day it is deliciously cool. You must go out!"

Madame von Wendenstein hesitated.

"It is needful for our patient's sake," said the surgeon, "that you should keep up your strength. What would become of him if you were to be ill? You must take a real walk. Fritz can take care of the patient, who wants nothing but sleep."

"Oh, I will stay here," cried Helena; but suddenly recollecting herself, she was silent, and looked down with a blush.

"I beg, my dear lady," said the candidate, "that you will follow our friend's prescription without any anxiety. I will remain with Herr von Wendenstein. I have learned what to do beside a sick bed. Go, for you all need this refreshment."

"Quick, then," said the doctor. "I will take you to a beautiful shady walk, and you will see what wonderful good you feel from that medicine which nature prescribes for all--fresh air."

Madame von Wendenstein put on her bonnet and mantle, and the young ladies followed her example. Helena looked anxiously at the wounded officer, and then hesitatingly followed the other ladies, who with the surgeon had already left the room.

The candidate, with downcast eyes and a gentle smile, accompanied her to the door. He then turned back, entered the sick-room, and seated himself in the armchair near the bed.

From his pale face the gentle smile and the expression of spiritual peace and priestly dignity vanished. His half-closed, downcast eyes opened widely, and were fixed upon the sleeper with a look of hatred, and his thin lips were pressed firmly together.

There was a wonderful contrast between the wounded officer--who lay stretched on his couch in light slumber, his eyes closed, the reflection of sweet and pure dreams shining in his face, whilst on his brow appeared a glimpse of heaven, a spark of the Divine breath--and the man who sat near him in the garments of a priest, a horrible expression of low, earthly passion and demoniacal hatred upon his countenance.

The wounded man tossed his head a little to and fro, as if he felt disturbed by the look the candidate fixed upon him, then with a deep sigh he opened his eyes and turned them joyfully towards the place where he hoped to see the beloved form that had filled his dreams. With large, surprised, almost frightened eyes, he saw the clergyman beside him. The candidate compelled his countenance suddenly to resume its usual calm expression, lowering his eyes to conceal their hatred, for he knew that even his strong powers of will could not at once banish this expression.

"Do you want anything, Herr von Wendenstein?" asked the candidate, in a low, gentle voice. "The ladies have gone out, and they have left me here to take care of you."

Lieutenant von Wendenstein raised his finger a little and pointed to a small table near the bed, on which stood a carafe of fresh water and a small vial filled with a red fluid.

The candidate poured a few drops of the medicine into a glass of water, and held it to the lieutenant's lips, who raised his head with some little difficulty and drank it.

The eyes of the wounded man said as plainly as possible, "I thank you."

The candidate put down the glass, folded his hands together, and said, as he cast down his eyes,--

"Did you think, Herr von Wendenstein, when your body craved earthly refreshment that your soul needed a spiritual medicine to strengthen and refresh it in the valley of the shadow of death, that if Providence sees fit to call it hence, it may be prepared to stand before the Judge, and to give an account of the deeds done in the flesh?"

The wounded man's eyes, which after the cooling drink, were closing again in slumbrous weariness, opened widely, and gazed upon the candidate with astonishment and fear. He was accustomed to be spoken to by looks, by signs, by single words whispered low, and his wearied nerves shuddered at this unusual mode of speech. Then, too, the loving care that had watched him in sickness and encouraged with fostering hand the seed of convalescence, had surrounded him with pictures of hope, with assurances of a new life blooming in the future, so that the sharp and sudden mention of death, with his threatening hand still stretched over him, affected him as if on a sunny, flower-scented day he had suddenly felt the ice-cold breath of a newly-opened vault. A slight shudder ran through his frame, and he feebly shook his head, as if to free himself from the gloomy picture so suddenly called up.

"Have you thought," continued the candidate, suddenly raising his voice and speaking sharply and impressively, "how you will pass through those black, dreadful hours, those hours now perhaps very near you, when your soul, with convulsive shudders, will tear itself free from the cold body--when your heart must leave every earthly joy, every earthly hope, and lay them in the dark depths of the grave, where the body, born of dust, must return to the dust of which it is formed?"

The eyes of the wounded man grew larger, a feverish glow burned on his cheeks, and there was an imploring expression in the look he turned upon the candidate.

He fixed his eyes upon the young officer with the electric fascinating gaze with which the rattlesnake turns its prey to stone.

"Have you thought," continued the candidate, and his sharp voice seemed to cut deep down into the sick man's soul, as his looks glared into his horror-stricken eyes, "have you thought, that then, at the trumpet blast of eternity, you must stand before the throne of a righteous and severe Judge and give an account of your life? Your last act was murder; the shedding of a brother's blood in a struggle justified by earthly laws; but must it not appear a deadly sin in the eyes of Eternal Justice?"

The features of the wounded man quivered, the feverish flush increased, and his eyelids sank and rose with a quick involuntary movement.

"Heaven has shown you great mercy," said the candidate, "you have been granted time for preparation here on a bed of sickness, for eternity, whilst many were called away in the midst of mortal sin. Have you worthily used the time so graciously granted you? Have you turned your thoughts and desires away from all worldly things, and fixed them on things eternal? Have you banished from your heart every earthly wish, every earthly hope? Does it not still cling to earth? Judge yourself, and let not the short time of grace be in vain!"

The candidate bent down lower and lower, and fixed his glaring eyes on those of the lieutenant, whose violent nervous agitation greatly increased. His pale hands trembled even to the tips of the fingers, he raised them with a repelling movement, and pointed to the table, whilst with difficulty in a feeble voice, he gasped "Water!"

The candidate brought the green fire of his sparkling eyes still closer to the sick man's face, he stretched his right hand over his head whilst with the fingers of the left he pointed to his heart, and he said in a low voice:

"Think of the Water of Life, try to become worthy of the Well-spring of Grace that alone can cool the torturing flames of eternal damnation. They are ready for you, if you do not use this short time of grace, and rend every earthly thought from your heart! The time that remains to you is brief, and if your soul still clings to the past, it will fall into the abyss already yawning before you!"

A slight red foam appeared on the wounded man's lips, his eyes opened widely, and stared unconsciously around. His out-stretched fingers were stiff, and his whole frame terribly convulsed.

The clergyman bent down closer over him, and in a harsh rough whisper muttered in his ear:

"The pit opens, the sulphurous flames ascend, you hear the lamentations of endless torment, the supplications of the damned that can no longer reach the Ear of Mercy; the light of heaven goes out, and the outcast soul sinks into the dreadful horror, which no living spirit can conceive, no living heart can imagine,--sinks, deeper, deeper,--ever deeper."

A sudden shudder passed through the wounded man's frame, a rattling breath forced itself from his labouring breast, his lips opened and a stream of thick black blood flowed from his mouth. His face grew deadly pale.

The candidate was silent, he rose slowly, his eyes firmly fixed on the face trembling in its death struggle; he drew back his hands and stood with a cruel smile, calm and motionless.

The door of the next room was softly opened and a careful footstep was heard.

The candidate started. With a great effort he compelled his features to resume their usual expression of pious dignity; he folded his hands on his breast, and turned his head towards the door.

Fritz Deyke appeared and cautiously popped in his head.

"Ah! you are here, sir?" he said in a whisper, "I was busy in the stable, but I heard the ladies had gone out, so I thought I would come and look at my lieutenant. Lord God in heaven!" he cried, suddenly rushing to the bed, "what is this? my lieutenant is dying!"

He seized the stiff hand of the sick man, and bent over the apparently lifeless body.

"I fear the worst," said the candidate calmly, in a mild voice, full of melancholy sympathy. "A violent cramp seized the poor young man, and the breaking of a blood-vessel seems to have ended our hopes. It was quick and sudden, whilst I was endeavouring to cheer him by friendly converse, and spiritual consolation!"

"My God! my God!" cried Fritz, "this is too horrible--what will become of his poor mother, of Miss Helena?"

And hastening to the door he called loudly, in an accent of grief and despair,--

"Margaret! Margaret!"

The young girl rushed upstairs; the sound of Fritz's voice as he called her had alarmed her, and she looked anxiously in at the door of the sick-room.

"My lieutenant is dying! for God's sake fetch the doctor quickly!" cried Fritz Deyke as he went to meet her.

Margaret glanced hastily at the bed, saw the pale face and streaming blood, and wringing her hands together, with a low outcry hastened away.

Fritz Deyke knelt before the bed, and with a handkerchief wiped away the blood from the lieutenant's mouth, repeating again and again, "My God! my God! his poor mother!"

The candidate went into the adjoining room, and seized his hat; then he suddenly determined to remain; he stood still for a moment, and then seated himself so that he could see into the sick-room.

Margaret had hastened out; she knew the way that the surgeon had taken with the ladies, and flew after him. She soon saw him near the first houses of the little town. He had led the ladies to a shady alley, and was taking leave of them, as he wished to return to his other patients.

The young maiden was quite breathless when she reached him. The surgeon looked at her with amazement, Helena's eyes were fixed upon her in anxious fear.

"For God's sake, sir!" cried Margaret, struggling for breath enough to bring out her words, "I think--I fear--the poor lieutenant--"

"What has happened?" cried the surgeon, in alarm.

"I fear he is dead," gasped Margaret. "Come, quick! quick!"

Madame von Wendenstein seized the surgeon's arm, as if seeking a support, but she hastened along in silence, really hurrying the doctor with her; he was endeavouring to gain from Margaret some particulars of this unexpected seizure.

Helena rushed on first, and her flying feet scarcely touched the ground. She uttered one cry when Margaret gave her terrible message, then she fled with vacant eyes through the streets, until she came to old Lohmeier's house, and flying up the stairs, reached the lieutenant's room.

She paused for a moment at the threshold, sighed deeply, and pressed both her hands against her breast. Then she opened the door, and stood gazing on the young man's deathlike face. Nothing had changed, and Fritz Deyke stood before him, carefully removing the blood that streamed from his lips with a white handkerchief.

Fritz raised his head and turned round. When he saw Helena standing there an image of silent despair, he comprehended that her sorrow was greater than his own. He rose slowly, and said, in a low, trembling voice,--

"I think the good God has called him; come, Miss Helena, if anyone can awake him, you can!"

And gently seizing her hand he led her to the bed.

She sank upon her knees, and taking the lieutenant's hand pressed it to her lips, breathing on it with her warm breath; her sad, tearless eyes were fixed upon his face, and her lips sometimes moved, repeating the same whispered words, "Oh! my God! let me follow him!"

Thus they continued motionless for some time--Helena crouched beside the bed, Fritz Deyke standing near her, and regarding her with great emotion, as he brushed away the tears with the back of his hand. The candidate sat in the adjoining room, with an expression of deep sympathy upon his features, his hands folded, and his lips moving as if in silent prayer.

Then came the surgeon and the two ladies.

Madame von Wendenstein was about to hasten to her son's bedside, but the surgeon held her back gravely, almost roughly.

"No one can be of any use here but myself," he said energetically; "the sick belong to me. Ladies must leave the room; if they are wanted, I will call them."

Fritz gently pushed Madame von Wendenstein and her daughter into the adjoining room; Helena rose quietly, and seated herself at some distance.

The surgeon approached the bed; he carefully examined the sick man's face, looked at the wound, and held his hand for a long time upon his heart, gazing at his watch at the same time.

The candidate went up to Madame von Wendenstein, who had sunk upon a chair, her face covered with her hands.

"Compose yourself, much honoured lady," he said in his gentlest voice; "all hope is not yet over, and if it is the will of Providence to put a period to your son's life, you must think how many, many parents have to bear the same, and often even greater sorrow."

Madame von Wendenstein only replied by her sobs.

The old surgeon now returned to the ladies. Scarcely had he left the bed, when Helena returned to her place, and again taking the hand strove to warm it with her breath.

"It is a frightful crisis," said the doctor; "I cannot understand its cause, but alas! it leaves us little hope. We must be prepared for the worst; but the heart still beats, and as long as there is a spark of life a physician does not despair. There is really nothing to be done; if nature does not help herself, our knowledge is powerless. But how," he continued, turning to the candidate, "did this alarming crisis come on? My patient was perfectly quiet when I last saw him."

"He continued so," said the candidate, "for some time after I had taken my place beside his bed; he awoke from a deep sleep, I gave him some drink, and he appeared quite well; whilst I was endeavouring to refresh his soul with spiritual consolation, a convulsive movement came on, followed by this gush of blood. It was quick and sudden."

"Well, well," said the surgeon, "what I hoped might proceed gently and gradually has taken

place suddenly, from a violent nervous crisis setting free the blood collected in the vessels. It is scarcely possible that this can have happened without causing serious mischief, besides the frightful effect upon the nerves. Did you talk to him much?" he asked, looking firmly at the candidate.

"I said," he replied, folding his hands, "what my calling requires me to say to the sick, I hardly know whether he understood me."

"Forgive me, sir," said the surgeon, in a brusque voice, shaking his head, "I am not one of those who despise religion, and from my heart I believe that all help comes from God; but in this case it really would have been better to let him sleep."

"The word of God, with its wondrous power, is never out of place," replied the candidate in a cold tone of conviction, raising his eyes with a pious expression.

"My God! my God!" cried Helena from the next room, in a loud, half-frightened, half-joyful voice, "he lives, he wakes!"

They all hastened into the room; the physician went to the head of the bed, whilst Helena still knelt and pressed the lieutenant's hand to her lips.

He had opened his eyes, and turned a wondering look from one face to another, as if surprised at the excitement he saw on every countenance.

"What has happened?" he asked in a low, but perfectly clear voice, whilst a slight flow of blood still came from his lips. "I have had a bad, bad dream,--I thought I was dying."

His eyes closed again.

The surgeon raised the pillows that supported his head, gently took his hand from Helena, and examined his pulse.

"A glass of wine," he cried.

Fritz Deyke hurried away, and returned in a moment with a glass of old dark red wine.

The surgeon held it to his patient's lips. He drank it eagerly to the last drop.

In trembling anxiety they all awaited the result. Helena's face was as pale as marble; her soul lay in her eyes.

After a short time a tinge of colour came to von Wendenstein's cheek, a deep sigh heaved his breast, and he opened his eyes.

They rested on Helena, and a smile passed over his face.

"Draw a deep breath," said the doctor.

He did so immediately.

"Does it hurt you?"

The young officer shook his head slightly, his eyes still fixed on Helena.

The doctor again felt his pulse, laid his hand on his brow, and listened attentively to his breathing.

He then went up to Madame von Wendenstein, and said, as he held out his hand to her with a joyful smile, "Nature has conquered this violent crisis, now only rest and nourishment are needed; thank God, your son is saved!"

The old lady approached the bed, pressed an affectionate kiss upon her son's brow, and gazed long into his eyes.

Then she left the room, and sank upon the sofa in the adjoining apartment: the frightful excitement and the long, anxious suspense had so exhausted her strength that her whole soul sought relief in a storm of tears.

Helena remained sitting near the bed, still holding the hand of her beloved, still gazing upon him calm and motionless, the brilliancy of perfect happiness on her pale features.

The candidate remained standing, with folded hands; he retained the gentle smile unchanged upon his lips, whilst his eyes never moved from the scene at the lieutenant's bedside.

After a little consideration the doctor wrote a prescription, and, rising with the paper in his hand, joined the others.

"Our patient must take this every hour," he said. "I hope he may sleep quietly during the night; to-morrow, or the next day, we can begin a strengthening diet, and if God continues to help us,

we may soon look for a rapid recovery."

He turned to the Candidate Behrmann.

"Forgive my hasty words," he said gravely. "You were right when you spoke of the divine power of God's word. God has indeed performed a wonder; not one case in a hundred would have passed through such a crisis favourably. I bow before this wonder, and with you I look up with thankfulness and adoration to the Day-spring who sends down knowledge and faith to us, as rays of light from an eternal centre."

He spoke warmly and feelingly as he held out his hand to the candidate. An indescribable expression appeared on Behrmann's face. He cast down his eyes, bent his head, and was silent.

Then he remembered that many sick friends were wanting him, and he took leave of Madame von Wendenstein with a few words of sympathy. He went up to Helena and took her hand.

Why did she withdraw it with a hasty movement of fear? Why did an icy coldness stream from his fingers to her heart? Did she see the involuntary look which flashed from his eyes when he approached the bed, or was it that secret instinct which causes unexplained sympathy and antipathy, often judging more truly than the longest experience, the deepest knowledge of mankind, or the most prudent reflection?

The physician and the candidate departed, and the ladies were left alone with the invalid, who fell into a calm sleep.

Fritz Deyke, whose strong nerves soon recovered from the excitement of the last hour, gave himself up completely to joy. After he had fetched the lieutenant's medicine he hastened into the little garden, where Margaret was watering her flowers, whose drooping heads told of the excessive heat of the last few days.

He said very little. He hurried to and fro, filling her watering-pot again and again; and then he made little channels in the ground to the roots of the plants, that the water might penetrate more quickly. He admired the quickness and grace with which Margaret watered her plants; how lightly and cleverly she raised the drooping flowers and tied them to sticks, and he saw that sometimes she looked kindly at him, and that she blushed a little when he observed it.

Then he seated himself with old Lohmeier and his daughter at their simple but excellent supper, and again he admired Margaret's adroitness and attention to her household duties, and the cheerful comfort she shed around her.

And he thought to himself how pretty she would look in the rich old farmhouse at Blechow, and how the elder Deyke would rejoice at having such a housekeeper and daughter-in-law. What Margaret thought was her own secret, but she looked supremely happy as she served her father and his guest, and performed all the duties of an attentive housewife, with the skill of an experienced hostess and the grace of a lovely girl.

Thus quiet joy and hopeful happiness prevailed throughout the good burgher house in Langensalza.

The candidate Behrmann visited many of the sick and wounded, and unweariedly spoke eloquent and impressive words of comfort, and he refused all thanks with humility. He advised and ordered in the hospitals; and praises of the pious, gifted, and exemplary young clergyman resounded from every lip.

CHAPTER XXI.

RECONCILIATION.

Countess Frankenstein sat in the reception-room of her house in the Herrengasse, in Vienna. Nothing had altered in this salon; the prodigious events and the mighty storms that had shaken the power of the House of Hapsburg to its very foundations could not have been suspected from the aspect of this room when unoccupied, so complete was its stamp of aristocratic immutability and perfect repose. There was the same old furniture which had already served several generations, now looking down from their faintly gleaming frames of tarnished gilding upon the doings of their children and grand-children; there was the high, wide chimney-piece, the flames from which had been reflected in the bright, youthful eyes of those who long ago had become staid grandmothers; there was the same clock with its groups of shepherds and shepherdesses which had marked the moment of birth and the moment of death of many a member of the family,

and with equal calmness had added second to second in hours of joy or hours of sorrow. Amongst all these objects, lifeless indeed but full of memories, and accustomed to look calmly on the happiness or sadness of generations passed away, sat the living beings of the present, deeply moved and distressed by the terrible and unexpected blow which had fallen on the House of Hapsburg and on Austria.

The old Countess Frankenstein was grave and dignified as ever, but there was a sorrowful expression on her proud, calm face as she sat on the large sofa; beside her, dressed in black, sat the Countess Clam Gallas, whoso tearful eyes were often covered with her embroidered handkerchief. Opposite the ladies sat General von Reischach; his fresh, healthy face glowed brightly as ever, the dark eyes looked out keen and lively beneath his short white hair, but though this expression of jovial cheerfulness could not be banished, there was beyond it a look of melancholy grief. Countess Clara sat beside her mother, leaning back in an arm-chair, and on her young and beautiful face lay a breath of deep sorrow, for she was a true daughter of the proud Austrian aristocracy, and she felt deeply and keenly the humiliation which the ancient banners of the empire had suffered at Königgrätz, but her melancholy was spread but as a light veil over the joy and happiness that filled her dreamy eyes. Notwithstanding all the dangers of Trautenau and Königgrätz, Lieutenant von Stielow had returned unwounded; the war was now as good as ended, she feared no fresh perils for him, and when the war was concluded, preparations for the marriage were to be commenced.

The young countess sat in a dreamy reverie, pursuing the charming pictures unrolled for the future, and hearing little of the conversation carried on around her.

"This disaster is the effect of the incomprehensible regard shown to the clamour of the lower classes," cried Countess Clam Gallas, in a voice trembling with grief and anger. "Benedek received the chief command because he was 'a man of the people;' the officers of noble birth were thus hurt, injured, and passed over; we now see what all this has led to. I have nothing to say against the rights of merit and talent," she continued, "history teaches us that great field marshals have been found among common soldiers, but people should not be pushed forward who have no talent and whose only merit is courage, simply because they are not of distinguished birth! And now they make the aristocracy answerable for the defeat. Count Clam's treatment is an insult to the whole of the Austrian aristocracy."

"You must not look upon it in that light, countess," said General von Reischach; "on the contrary, I think the proceedings against Count Clam Gallas will stop all evil mouths, for it will be an excellent opportunity for stating the real causes of our defeat. When public opinion, led on by a couple of journalists, had loaded the count with reproaches, he was right in demanding a strict investigation, and it was Mensdorff's duty to urge it upon the emperor. Let us wait the result, it will show that the Austrian nobility is above reproach."

"It is very hard," cried the countess, "to be so personally affected by the common misfortune!" And she wiped the tears that had again flowed, with her handkerchief.

"Tell us, Baron Reischach," said Countess Frankenstein, after a short pause, wishing to give the conversation a different turn; "tell us about the King of Hanover, you once held a command in his service. I have the greatest admiration for that heroic prince, and the deepest commiseration for his unhappy fate."

"It is wonderful," said the general, "with what resignation and cheerfulness the king bears his evil fortune, and the difficult position he is now placed in. He is still full of hope; I fear it deceives him!"

"Do you believe they will really venture to dethrone him?" cried the Countess Frankenstein.

"Alas! I am quite sure of it," said General von Reischach.

"And I, alas! cannot doubt it, from what Mensdorff has told me," said Countess Clam Gallas.

"And must Austria bear this?" cried Countess Frankenstein, a bright flush of auger upon her usually calm face, and her eyes sparkling with excitement.

"Austria bears everything, and will have to bear still more!" said the general, shrugging his shoulders. "I see before us a long course of misfortune, they will again experiment, and every fresh experiment will pluck a jewel from our crown and a leaf from our laurels; I fear they will pursue the path of Joseph II."

"God protect Austria!" cried Countess Frankenstein, folding her hands. "Will the King of Hanover remain here?" she asked, after a short pause.

"It seems so," replied General von Reischach, "he lives in Baron Knesebeck's house, in the Wallnerstrasse, Countess Wilezek has given him up her apartments; but I have heard he will soon retire to the Duke of Brunswick's villa at Hietzing. It would be much better for the king to go to England, he is by birth an English prince, and if he succeeded in interesting public opinion there in his behalf, which with his charm of manner would not be difficult, England would perhaps help him, and she is the only power who could help him; but he is disinclined, and Count Platen appears very incapable of persuading the king to take any decided course."

"Count Platen visited me," said Countess Clam Gallas; "he does not believe in the annexation of Hanover."

"There are people who never believe in the devil, until he has got them by the throat," cried Baron von Reischach: "there is General Brandis, a plain old soldier, with a quick clear understanding, he would be much the best counsellor for the king in a position in which rapid and firm decision can alone avail, but he is not supported by Platen."

"How many disasters a few days have brought forth!" cried Countess Frankenstein.

"Well," said General von Reischach, as he rose, "you must console yourself with the happiness that blooms in your family; I would bet anything," he added, laughing, "that Countess Clara's thoughts are filled with pleasant pictures."

The young countess started from her dreams, a flying blush passed over her face, and she said, laughingly,--

"What can you know about young ladies' thoughts?"

"I know so much about them," replied the general, "that I should not venture now to bring my little countess a doll, she must have one in a green uniform with a red plume."

"I want neither dolls nor anything else from you," replied the young countess, pretending to pout.

General von Reischach and Countess Clam Gallas took leave.

Countess Frankenstein and her daughter accompanied them to the door, and had only been a few moments alone when a servant entered and said:

"There is a gentleman here, who asks very pressingly for an interview with the countess."

"Who is it?" she asked, with surprise, for she had few visitors except those belonging to her own exclusive circle of society.

"Here is his card," said the servant, handing a visiting card to the countess. "He assures me it is greatly to your ladyship's interest to hear what he has to say."

Countess Frankenstein took the card, and read, with a look of astonishment--"E. Balzer, Exchange Agent."

A deep flush passed over Countess Clara's face, she looked anxiously at her mother and pressed her handkerchief to her lips.

"I cannot understand," said the countess, "what a person so entirely unknown to me can want; however, let him come in!"

In a few moments Herr Balzer entered the salon. He was dressed in black, and his common-looking face bore an expression of grave dignity which did not appear to belong to it.

He approached the ladies with a manner in which the boldness of the habitué of a coffee-house was mingled with the embarrassment of a man who, accustomed only to low society, suddenly finds himself amongst persons of distinction.

Countess Frankenstein looked at him with a cold, proud gaze, whilst Clara, after her large eyes had taken in his vulgar appearance with a hasty glance, cast them down and waited in trembling expectation for the reason of this unexpected visit.

"I have consented to receive you, sir," said the countess, with easy calmness, "and I beg you to tell me the important matter you have to impart."

Herr Balzer bowed with affected dignity and said:

"A most melancholy affair, gracious countess, brings me to you,--an affair in which we, you and I, or rather your daughter and I, have a common interest."

Clara fixed her eyes upon him with great surprise and painful suspense; the haughty look of the countess asked plainer than words, "What interest can I have in common with this man?"

Herr Balzer saw this look, and an almost imperceptible smile appeared on his lips.

"A very painful and distressing circumstance," he said slowly and hesitatingly, "obliges me, your ladyship, to confide my honour to you, and to consult with you, as to what is best to be done."

"I pray you, sir," said the countess, in an icy voice, "to come to the fact you have to communicate. My time is much engaged."

Without paying any attention to this intimation, Herr Balzer proceeded, apparently with some

embarrassment, whilst twirling his hat in his hands:

"Your daughter is engaged to Lieutenant von Stielow?"

The countess looked at him, almost rigid with amazement. She began to fear she had admitted a madman. A slight shiver passed through Clara's tender form; deep paleness overspread her features, and she did not dare to lift her eyes to this man, for an instinctive suspicion warned her he must be the bearer of something evil.

Herr Balzer drew a handkerchief from his pocket and covered his eyes. In a theatrical manner he walked towards the countess, exclaiming, whilst he stretched out his hand:

"Countess, you will understand me at once, you must understand me; I trust my fate to your discretion,--only in common with yourself can this melancholy transaction--"

"I must really beg you, sir," said Countess Frankenstein, looking anxiously at the bell, from which she was separated by Herr Balzer, "I must really beg you to state the facts."

"Herr von Stielow," said Balzer, again covering his eyes with his large yellow silk pocket-handkerchief.

Clara folded her hands in breathless suspense.

"Herr von Stielow," repeated Herr Balzer, in a voice that appeared to struggle for composure, "that volatile young man who is so happy in the possession of so lovely, so worthy a fiancée," he bowed to Clara, who turned from him with disgust, "this volatile young man dares to rob me of my happiness, to destroy my peace--he keeps up a criminal correspondence with my wife."

With a low cry, Clara sank down upon the chair before which she stood, and wept silently.

Countess Frankenstein remained standing upright. Her eyes rested fiercely and proudly upon this detestable messenger of evil, and in a voice in which no emotion was perceptible, she asked:

"And how do you know this, sir? Are you quite sure?"

"Alas! only too sure," cried Herr Balzer, pathetically, again applying his handkerchief to his eyes, which were quite red with repeated rubbing.

"Some time ago," he said, "my friends warned me; but my confidence in my wife--I love my wife, gracious countess: ah! she was my whole happiness--prevented my heeding these warnings; then, too, Baron von Stielow's engagement with the lovely countess"--he again bowed to Clara--"was well known in Vienna; I felt quite safe, since I was simple-hearted enough,"--he laid his hand on his black satin waistcoat--"to believe such an error impossible."

"Well?" asked the countess.

"At last, by chance--oh! my heart will break when I think of it--yesterday I discovered the frightful truth."

The countess made a movement of impatience.

He threw a side glance at the easy-chair, in which the younger lady sat motionless, her face covered with her handkerchief, and with the malice of vulgar natures who instinctively hate those of a higher grade, he seemed disposed to prolong her torture.

"Amongst the letters brought to me," he continued, after some hesitation, "there was one intended for my wife. I did not observe the address, and I opened it, believing it directed to myself. It contained the horrible, too certain proof of my misfortune."

Clara gave a low sob.

The countess asked with cold severity,--

"Where is this letter?"

Herr Balzer, with a deep, strongly marked sigh, felt in the breast pocket of his coat, pulled out a folded letter, and gave it to the countess. She took it, opened it, and read the contents slowly. Then throwing it on the table, she said:

"What have you done?"

"Countess," cried Herr Balzer, in the same pathetic voice, "I love my wife; she has greatly erred, it is true, but I love her still, and I cannot give up the hope of reclaiming her."

The countess shrugged her shoulders, almost imperceptibly, and cast a look full of contempt upon the exchange agent.

"I do not wish for a separation,--I would rather forgive her," he continued, in a tearful voice; "and I have come, therefore, to speak to you, countess, to consult with you,--to implore you to--"

"What?" asked the countess.

"You see, I thought," said Herr Balzer, turning his hat round and round more quickly, "if you,--Vienna is now a very sad place to reside in,--if you would go to your country estates, or into Switzerland, or to the Italian lakes, far away from here, and if you would take Lieutenant von Stielow with you, he would leave Vienna, and could not continue to have any intercourse with my wife: I too would take her away somewhere for a time. After his marriage with the lovely countess, the young couple would naturally visit Baron von Stielow's family for a time; he would forget my wife,--all would come straight, if we only work together at the same plan!"

He spoke slowly, and with much hesitation, often interrupting himself, and casting stolen looks now at the mother, now at the daughter. Before he had finished speaking, Clara had sprung to her feet, her eyes, red with weeping, were fixed on him with burning anger; and as he concluded, she looked at her mother with anxious suspense, her lips half opened, as if she almost feared her mother might not give the right reply.

Countess Frankenstein drew herself up, with a movement full of pride, and said in a tone of cold contempt:

"I thank you for your communication, sir; it has opened my eyes in time. I regret I cannot assist you in the way you wish, to re-establish your domestic happiness. You must understand it cannot be the task of a Countess Frankenstein to cure the Baron Stielow of an unworthy passion, nor can she consent to continue an engagement which the baron has not respected. You must find some other means of reclaiming your wife."

Clara's eyes expressed her perfect approval of her mother's words; with a proud movement she turned her back upon Herr Balzer, and, suppressing her tears with a great effort, she looked out of one of the large panes of glass in the high window of the salon.

Herr Balzer wrung his hands, as if in despair, and cried with well-acted emotion:

"My God! countess, forgive me, if I thought only of my own sorrow and grief, only of myself and my wife, and did not consider that difficulty. I thought, too, you wished so much for this *parti*, which is so excellent, and I hoped you would act in concert with me to bring everything to a good end."

"A Countess Frankenstein is not in a position to wish for a *parti* unworthy of her, and one her heart cannot approve," said the countess, the cold calmness of her manner unchanged. "I believe, sir," she continued, bowing very slightly, "that it is scarcely necessary to continue this conversation."

Herr Balzer wrung his hands, and cried in a tone of despair:

"Oh, my God! my God! countess, what have I done! I now understand perfectly that your daughter, under the circumstances, cannot continue her engagement,--that I was foolish to hope to re-establish peace through your assistance. Oh, my God, I had better have remained silent!"

The countess looked at him inquiringly.

"Then," he continued, in the same tone, "everything might have gone on well; now, oh, God! all that is over! You will break off the engagement with Baron von Stielow, the whole world will hear of my misfortune, there will be a dreadful scandal in Vienna, and I shall have to separate from my wife. Ah! and I love my wife; I wish so to forgive her, to reclaim her,--and I shall love her for ever!"

He paused for a moment, and cast a cunning look at the countess, whose features had assumed an expression of deep thought.

Then he added still louder, and wringing his hands still more:

"Oh! my gracious countess, have compassion on me. I came to you in perfect confidence to confide to you the frightful secret of my misfortune. I see you cannot help me, as I hoped; be merciful to me, and do not make it impossible for me to think of a way in which the worst may be averted. Keep my secret. Herr von Stielow in his rage and anger would revenge himself on me,--there would be nothing to restrain him,--then there would be a dreadful scandal; that may be a matter of indifference to you and your daughter, but to me and my wife--Oh! have compassion on me!" and he made a movement, as if about to throw himself at the feet of the countess. She still continued thoughtful.

"Sir," she said, "it is certainly neither my wish, nor my daughter's, to discuss this disagreeable affair with Baron Stielow."

Clara turned her head towards her mother, and thanked her with a look.

"I shall break off Countess Clara's engagement with Herr von Stielow in the quietest manner possible, and it will remain for you to do the best you can for yourself--your secret is safe with me. Again I thank you for your communication, however painful it was necessary, and has

preserved us from much worse pain in the future."

And she bowed her head in a way that showed Herr Balzer unmistakeably he was dismissed.

He again held his handkerchief before his eyes, and said, in a whining voice:

"I thank you, countess, I shall be eternally grateful to you; forgive me. I beg the young lady's forgiveness, too, for being the messenger of such evil tidings. But my lot is the worst. Oh! if you did but know how I loved my wife!"

And as if overcome by the immensity of his grief, he bowed in silence, and left the room.

He hastily brushed past the servant in the ante-room, and ran down the stairs; as soon as he had left the room the grave and sorrowful expression vanished from his face, a vulgar smile of triumph appeared upon his lips, and he said to himself, with great satisfaction,--

"Well, I think I did my business very well, and richly earned the thousand guldens my dearly beloved wife promised me, if I would free her dear Stielow. Now she can catch him again in her net; she will succeed, for she understands all that well, and then," he said, with a broader grin of satisfaction, "I shall have the right of grasping handfuls of the gold which this young millionaire will pour into her lap."

With quick steps, he hastened to his wife, to tell her of the success of his negotiation.

As soon as he left the room, Clara, without speaking a word, threw herself into her mother's arms, sobbing aloud. After the restraint she had put upon her feelings in the presence of a repulsive stranger, her tears flowed freely, and relieved the oppression of her heart.

"Be strong, my daughter," said the countess, gently stroking her shining hair. "God sends you a hard trial; but it is better to tear yourself free from an unworthy engagement, than that this blow should fall upon you later."

"Oh! my mother," cried the young countess, with the greatest grief, "this love made me so happy; he assured me so strongly he was quite free; I believed him so implicitly."

Suddenly raising herself from her mother's arms, she rushed to the table where the letter lay which Herr Balzer had given the countess.

With a slight shudder, she seized the fatal letter, and read the contents with large, dilated eyes.

Then she threw it from her with a look of horror, and sinking into a chair, wept bitterly.

"Go to your room, my child," said the countess, "you need rest. I will consider how matters can be arranged in the best and quietest way. The baron's absence makes it easier. We will go into the country; I will give the needful orders. Calm and compose yourself, that the world may perceive nothing. It is our duty to bear our sorrows alone: only vulgar souls show their troubles to the world. God will comfort you, and on the heart of your mother you will always find a place to weep."

And gently raising her daughter, she led her from the salon to the inner apartments, belonging exclusively to the ladies.

The regular strokes of the old clock's pendulum echoed through the silence of the large, empty room, and the ancestors' portraits looked down from their frames with their unchanging well-bred smile; their eyes too, though they looked so calm and cheerful, had wept in days long past, and with proud strength they had forced their tears back into their hearts, to avoid the pity or the spiteful joy of the world, and time as it rolled on, after hours of sorrow and pain, had brought the moment of happiness. There was nothing now in this old home of an old race.

The loud clatter of a sword was heard in the ante-room. The servant opened the door, and Lieutenant von Stielow entered, fresh and cheerful. He looked round the room with sparkling eyes. He turned with disappointment to the servant.

"The ladies were here a moment ago," he said. "The countess had just received a person on business; they must have gone to their own apartments. I will send, and mention that Baron--"

"No, my friend," cried the young officer, "do not announce me; the ladies will soon return, and I shall surprise them. Say nothing."

The servant bowed, and left the room.

The young officer walked several times up and down the room. A smile of happiness rested on his face--the joy of reunion, after an eventful separation, during which he had been threatened by death in many forms; the anticipation of the joyful surprise he should behold in the eyes of his beloved, all combined to fill his young, fresh heart with joy and enchantment.

He went up to the low fauteuil, in which Countess Clara usually sat beside her mother, and he

pressed his lips against the back, where he knew her head had rested.

Then he seated himself in the chair, half closed his eyes, and gave himself up to a sweet, soft reverie, and the old clock's pendulum measured the time the young man spent in happy dreams, with the same regular stroke as it had numbered the moments of torture that had wrung the heart of her who filled his dreams.

Whilst the young baron sat awaiting his happiness, Clara had gone to her own apartment. It was a square room, with a large window, decorated with grey silk. Before the window stood a writing table, and near it a high pyramidal stand of blooming flowers, whose fragrance filled the room. Upon the writing-table, on an elegant bronze easel, stood a large photograph of her fiancé; he had given it to her just before his departure to join the army. In a niche in one corner of the room was a *prie-dieu* chair, and a beautiful crucifix in ebony and ivory, with a small shell, containing holy water, hung upon the wall.

This room contained everything calculated to please a faultless taste, and to enrich and embellish life. This room had been so full of happiness and hope when the young countess left it,--and now? The perfume of the flowers was as sweet as an hour ago; the sunshine fell as brightly through the windows; but where was the happiness? where was the hope?

Clara threw herself on her knees before the image of the crucified Saviour, where she had often found comfort in the childish sorrows of her early life. She clasped her beautiful hands in fervent prayer, her tearful eyes hung on the image of the Redeemer, her lips moved in half-uttered, imploring words; but not as before did peace and rest sink into her soul.

A wild storm of various emotions raged within her. There was deep sorrow for her lost happiness, there was defiant anger at the deceit that had played upon her love, there was swelling pride at the contempt shown to her feelings, and finally there was bitter, jealous hatred of the unworthy being to whom she had been sacrificed. All these emotions surged and raged in her head, in her heart, in her veins; and the prayer her lips pronounced would not arise to heaven, the peaceful light of believing self-sacrifice would not kindle within her.

She stood up and sighed deeply. Not grief, but anger flashed in her eyes. Her white teeth bit into her lip, she paced up and down the room, her hands pressed upon her bosom, as if to still the raging storm threatening to break her heart.

Then she stood still before her writing-table, and looked angrily at von Stielow's portrait.

"Why did you come into my life," she cried, "to rob me of my peace, and to make me purchase a few hours' happiness with such frightful tortures?"

Her looks rested long on the portrait. Slowly and gradually the angry expression passed from her features; a mild, sorrowful light shone in her eyes.

"And my short happiness was so fair," she whispered. "Is it then possible that those true eyes could lie? Is it possible that at the very time---"

She sank into a chair near her table, and half involuntarily following the sweet habit of the last short time, she opened an ebony casket, enriched with mother-o'-pearl and gold.

In this casket were the letters her lover had written to her from the camp. They were all short, hurried notes, many of them very dirty from the numerous hands they had passed through before they reached her. She knew them all by heart, those love greetings that said so little and yet so much, that she had waited for with such longing, that she had received with such exulting joy, that she had read and read again with such happiness.

Mechanically she took one of the letters, and allowed her eyes slowly to follow the lines.

Then she threw away the paper with a movement of horror.

"And with the same hand," she cried, "with which he wrote these words--" She did not finish the sentence, but gazed gloomily before her.

"But is it true?" she cried, suddenly; "can it not be malice, envy? Oh, I knew that this woman was once no stranger to him. I have not seen the writings side by side to compare them. Good heavens!" she cried, with horror, "that wretched letter lies in the drawing-room; if one of the servants----" And hastily springing up, she hurried from the room, glided swiftly through the intervening apartments, reached the drawing-room, and advanced at once to the table where the fatal letter lay between two vases of flowers upon some tapestry work.

The sound of her footsteps aroused the young officer from his reverie. He rose hastily from his half-recumbent position, in which he had been completely concealed by the high back of the chair, and he saw her his dreams had pictured standing really before him, her face expressing indescribable agitation.

It would be impossible to find words to tell the feelings that passed through the young girl's mind in one moment. Her heart beat high with joyful surprise when she saw her lover so

unexpectedly; but the next instant bitter sorrow rushed upon her as she remembered she was for ever separated from the happiness that had been hers. Her thoughts grew indistinct, she had neither the strength to speak nor to withdraw, she stood motionless, her large dilated eyes fixed upon him whom she so unexpectedly beheld.

With one bound the young man was beside her, he opened his arms as if about to embrace her, but quickly recollecting himself, he sank down on one knee, seized her hand, which she yielded involuntarily, and impressed upon it a long, warm, and affectionate kiss.

"Here, sweet joy of my heart, star of my love," he cried, "here is your true knight again; your talisman has been my protection; the holy light of my star was stronger than all the threatening clouds that surrounded me."

And with bright eyes, filled with happiness, love, and adoring admiration, he looked up at her.

She gazed at him, but there was no expression in her widely opened eyes, it seemed as if all her blood had flowed back to her heart, as if all her ideas, all her powers of will, were banished by the overwhelming feelings of the last few moments.

He was rejoiced at this motionless silence, which he ascribed to surprise at his sudden return, and he said:

"General Gablenz has been sent for by the emperor, and he brought me here, so that I greet my darling sooner than I expected!" And taking from his uniform a gold case set with a C in brilliants, he added with a happy smile, "here is the talisman from my lady's hand, which preserved me through every danger; it has rested on my heart, and it can tell you that its every beat has been true to my love."

He opened the case, and in the interior, upon blue velvet beneath a glass setting, lay a faded rose.

"Now," he cried, "I need the dead talisman no longer, I see my living rose blooming before me!"

He stood up, gently laid his arm around her shoulder and pressed a kiss upon her brow.

A slight shudder passed through her, her eyes sparkled with anger and contempt, a brilliant red glowed on her cheeks.

With a hasty movement she tore herself free.

"Baron," she cried, "I must beg--you surprise me!"

She stammered; her lips trembled, she could not find words to express what she thought and felt, she could not say what she wished to say.

After a moment's silence she turned to leave the room.

The young officer stood as if struck by lightning, her strange words, the expression on her face, told him that something must have taken place to cause a breach between him and his love, but it was impossible for him to form any clear idea as to what it could be, and he looked at her in blank amazement. But when she turned to leave him and had actually reached the door, he stretched out both his arms towards her, and cried in a voice so full of love and regret, of grief and inquiry, that it could only proceed from the deepest and truest feeling, "Clara!"

She started at this voice, which found an echo in her heart, she stood still, her strength left her, she tottered.

He was beside her in a moment, he supported her, and led her to an easy-chair, in which he gently placed her.

Then he knelt before her and cried in an imploring tone, "For God's sake, Clara, what has happened, what distresses you?"

She held her handkerchief before her eyes and wept, struggling violently for composure.

The door opened, and Countess Frankenstein entered.

She looked at the scene before her in utter amazement.

Herr von Stielow sprang to his feet.

"Countess!" he cried, "can you explain the riddle I find here--what has happened to Clara?" The countess looked at him with grave severity.

"I did not expect you to-day, Herr von Stielow," she said, "or I should have given orders for you to be told at once that my daughter is suffering, and very unwell. We must leave Vienna for a long time; and I think under the circumstances it would be better to annul the plans we had formed

for the future. My child," she said, turning to her daughter who sat still, weeping quietly, "go to your room."

"Clara ill?" cried the young man in the greatest alarm. "My God, how long has this been so? but no, no, something else has happened. I beg you----"

Suddenly the young countess stood up. She raised her head proudly, fixing her eyes firmly on Herr von Stielow, then turning to her mother she said,--

"Chance, or rather Providence has brought him here, there shall be truth between us; I at least will not be guilty of the sin of falsehood." And before the countess could say a word she had walked to the table with a firm step, seized the letter still lying there, and with a movement full of proud dignity handed it to the young officer. Then she again burst into tears and threw herself into her mother's arms.

Herr von Stielow glanced at the paper.

A deep blush overspread his face.

He ran his eyes hastily over the writing, then casting his eyes on the ground, he said:

"I do not know how this letter came here, yet I thought, from a few words Clara once said, that she knew of an error into which I fell: I thought that in spite of the past she gave me her heart, and I cannot understand----"

Clara rose and looked at him with flaming eyes.

"In spite of the past!" she cried; "yes, because I believed your word, that all this past was at an end; I did not know that this past was to share my present!"

"But, my God!" exclaimed Herr von Stielow, looking at her with great surprise, "I do not understand; how can this old letter----"

"An old letter?" said the Countess Frankenstein severely, "it is a week old."

"It bears the date of your last letter to me!" cried Clara.

Herr von Stielow looked at the paper with amazement.

His eyes opened widely. He stared blankly at the letter which he held motionless before him.

At last he turned to the ladies with sparkling eyes, and a face much heightened in colour.

"I know not what demon has been at work--I know not who desires to tear asunder two hearts that God destined for each other. Countess," he said, "you owe me the truth, I demand who gave you this paper?"

Clara's eyes were fixed anxiously on the young man's face, her bosom rose and fell.

The face of the countess expressed the repugnance she had felt during the whole conversation; she replied coldly:

"Your word of honour to be silent!"

"I give it," said Herr von Stielow.

"Then," said the countess, "this letter accidentally fell into the hands of this lady's husband, and he----"

"Deceit! shameful deceit!" cried von Stielow, half angrily, half joyfully, "I do not yet quite see through it, but be it as it may, countess--Clara--this letter is a year old; see, if you look closely, the date is freshly written. This is a scandalous intrigue!"

He handed the letter to the countess.

She did not hold out her hand to take it. She looked at the young man coldly. In Clara's eyes gleamed a ray of hope; it is so easy to a loving heart to believe and to trust.

Herr von Stielow threw down the paper.

"You are right, countess," he cried, drawing himself up proudly; "such proofs are for lawyers!"

Then he approached Clara, knelt on one knee before her, drew the case with the faded rose from his uniform, and placed his hand upon it.

"Clara," he said in an earnest loving voice that came from the depth of his soul, "by the holy remembrance of the first hours of our love, by this talisman, which has been with me through all the dangers of battle, I swear;--this letter was written a year ago, before I ever saw you." He raised his hand and lightly touched her breast with his finger point. "By your own pure noble

heart I swear that no thought of this erring meteor, whose rays once led me astray, has ever dwelt within me, since your love arose to be the pure star of my life--your love to which I will be true to death!"

He stood up.

"Countess," he said in a calm grave voice, "I give you my word of honour as a nobleman; by the name which my ancestors have borne with honour from generation to generation for centuries, by my sword which I used in those dreadful days without reproach, against the enemies of Austria--the date of this letter is false. Since Clara gave me her love I have never exchanged a syllable with this woman, I have never thought of her, except in repentant remembrance of a past error! I do not ask if you believe my word," he proceeded, "a Countess Frankenstein cannot doubt the word of an Austrian nobleman, nor think he would purchase a life's happiness by a lie. But I ask you," he said in a warmer tone, turning to Countess Clara, whose eyes were beaming with happiness, "I ask you if you believe my heart is yours without reserve or doubt? if now that the past is unveiled between us, and we have spoken of it, you will continue to be the star of my life, or whether in darkness I must pursue a solitary path, which my hopes once promised should be full of sunshine and flowers?"

With downcast eyes he waited in silence.

The young countess looked at him with the deepest love. A smile of happiness hovered on her lips. With a light step she glided towards him; stood still before him, and with a charming movement held out her hand.

He raised his eyes, and saw her gentle sparkling looks, her lovely smile, her slight blush. He opened his arms quickly and she leaned against him, and hid her face on his breast.

The countess looked at the beautiful pair with a mild and happy smile, and a long silence prevailed in the lofty room.

But the old clock measured these moments with its calm pendulum, the moments follow each other with eternal regularity, and never change for the short joys and long sorrows which form the life of man on earth.

When Clara returned to her room late in the evening, she laid the golden case with the faded rose at the foot of the crucifix, and now her prayers went up as lightly winged to heaven as the perfume of spring flowers, and in her heart as pure and wondrous melodies arose, as the song of praise of the angels who surround the throne of eternal love.

CHAPTER XXII.

RUSSIA.

In a large well-lighted cabinet of his palace in St. Petersburg, before an enormous table covered with heaps of papers, which, notwithstanding their number, were evidently in exemplary order, sat the vice-chancellor of the Russian empire, Prince Alexander Gortschakoff.

Although it was still early morning, the prince was carefully dressed. He wore a black frock coat, unbuttoned and thrown back on account of the heat, over under-clothes of some white summer material. The fine intelligent face, with its expression of suppressed irony about the mouth, and with short, grey hair, was buried behind a high black cravat and tall linen collar, and the eyes that usually looked out so keenly, so prudently, with such good-tempered, almost roguish humour, through their gold-rimmed spectacles, gazed into the young day displeased and discontented.

Before the prince stood his confidential secretary, Monsieur von Hamburger; a slender man, of the middle height, with an open, intelligent expression, and lively, clever eyes.

He was in the act of bringing before the prince various personal affairs, without any connexion to diplomacy. Before him, on the prince's table, lay a large packet of acts and papers.

He had just ended a report, and with a pencil he held in his hand he noted down the minister's resolution on its contents. Then he laid the paper on the large pile of acts, took it up from the table and bowed, to show that his business was concluded.

The prince looked at him with some surprise.

"Have you finished?" he asked shortly.

"At your command, Excellency."

"You have a heap of things you are taking away again?" said the prince, glancing at the thick packet von Hamburger held beneath his arm.

"I shall have the honour of bringing these matters before you on some future day," said the secretary.

"Why not to-day? You have been here but a quarter of an hour, and we have still time!" said the minister, with a slight accent of impatience in his voice.

Monsieur von Hamburger allowed his quick eyes to rest for a moment on the prince's face in silence, then he said calmly, with a slight smile,--

"Your Excellency must, I fear, have passed a bad night, and you feel in no gracious mood. I have, besides these reports, various matters which, on the ground of justice and courtesy, it is very desirable to consider in a friendly spirit before presenting them to his majesty the emperor. I think your Excellency will be angry with me by-and-bye if I expose these affairs to the reception that at the present moment seems probable."

The prince looked at him for a moment firmly through his gold spectacles without his secretary's casting down his eyes, or at all changing the smiling, cheerful expression of his countenance.

"Hamburger," he then said, still in a peevish voice, though the first appearance of returning good humour was seen in the corners of his eyes, "I shall make you my doctor! Alas! you don't know how to find the remedy, but as far as the diagnosis is concerned, you are a born physician. I shall no longer have the right of being in a bad temper before you."

"Your Excellency will certainly never state," said von Hamburger, smiling and bowing, "that I took the liberty of remarking upon your temper; I only begged permission to defer my business until this temper--your Excellency yourself used the expression--had passed away."

"Ought I not to be in a bad temper?" cried the prince, half laughing, half impatient, "when the whole world is departing from its old orderly course, when the balance of European power, already severely shaken, kicks the beam,--and when all this takes place without Russia having any part in it, without gaining anything for itself in the new arrangement of affairs! I am glad," he added thoughtfully, "that Austria is beaten, Austria, who with unheard-of ingratitude forsook us in the hour of need, and with false friendship injured us more than our open foes; but that victory should go so far as to enable Prussia to dethrone the legitimate princes in Germany, and that the German nation should be close to us, able to threaten our frontier, causes me heavy anxiety. Prussia," he said, after a short pause, "was our friend--it was, it must be so; but what now arises is not Prussia, it is Germany; and I remember with what hatred against Russia the German nation was saturated in 1848. In Paris they will do nothing, except ask for compensation, which I think they will not get. Yes, if Napoleon could have determined to act, then the moment would have come in which we could have interfered; but to act alone is to us impossible."

"Your Excellency will hear what General Manteuffel brings; he will soon be here," said von Hamburger, drawing out his watch.

"What will he bring?" cried the prince, impatiently; "forms of speech, declarations--nothing more; and what shall we reply? we shall put a good face on a bad game--*voilà tout*."

Hamburger gave a meaning smile.

"Your Excellency must permit me to say," said he, "that personally I am convinced it is not right to regard the new formation of Germany with enmity; to prevent it is impossible; the old European balance of power has long been out of joint, and Russia is weighty enough," he added proudly, "not to fear any fresh distribution of power. Russia, that great and mighty nation, must not hang on to old traditions; she must go forth to meet the future free and unprejudiced; if the possessions of other states are increased, so be it--the power of Russia is not curtailed by an unalterable frontier."

He took from a portfolio he had brought with him a folded parchment, and laid it on the table beside the prince. He had listened attentively, and his quick eyes looked thoughtfully before him.

"What are you placing on the table?" he asked.

"The Treaty of Paris, your Excellency," replied Hamburger.

A fine smile appeared on the lips of the prince, a flashing glance flew from his eyes towards his secretary.

"Hamburger," he said, "you are a very remarkable man; I think we must be careful in your company."

"Why, Excellency?" asked the secretary, in a calm, naïve tone.

"I think you can read people's thoughts," replied the prince, whose ill humour had gradually vanished.

"In your Excellency's school one must learn a little of everything," said von Hamburger, laughing and bowing.

The prince took the Treaty of Paris and turned it over.

For a short time he pursued his thoughts in silence.

Then he looked up and asked,--

"Is General von Knesebeck, whom the King of Hanover has sent here, already at Zarskoë Selo?"

"He went there immediately after your Excellency had given him an audience; his imperial majesty had commanded apartments to be prepared for him."

"Has the emperor seen him yet?" asked the prince.

"No, your Excellency," replied von Hamburger; "you requested the emperor not to receive him until you had spoken to General Manteuffel."

"True," replied the prince, thoughtfully; "the emperor feels great sympathy for the King of Hanover, but I would rather that he did not enter into any engagement. We could do little alone; the only thing would be for the emperor to use his personal influence with the King of Prussia to dissuade him from a policy of annexation. It is, however, highly important to proceed most cautiously in this affair; before taking each step his majesty must be perfectly clear as to its results and consequences."

A groom of the chambers entered and announced,--

"General von Manteuffel."

The secretary rose, and withdrew by a side door leading from the cabinet.

The prince stood up.

Every trace of displeasure had vanished from his countenance, there was nothing to be seen but calm and complete courtesy.

General von Manteuffel entered. He wore the full uniform of an adjutant-general of the King of Prussia, the blue enamelled cross of the Order of Merit around his neck, upon his breast the stars of the Russian orders of Alexander Nevsky and of the White Eagle, with the broad ribbon of the first, and the star of the Prussian Order of the Red Eagle.

The general's sharply-marked features, with the thick bushy hair growing low down upon the forehead, and the full beard only slightly cut away at the chin, had not the severe, almost gloomy expression which they were accustomed to wear. He approached the Russian minister with great cordiality and easy politeness, as if he were about to pay a simple visit of courtesy; but the quick, animated grey eyes glanced searchingly from beneath their thick brows, and were fixed with an expression of restless expectation upon the prince.

The prince held out his hand to the general, and invited him by a courteous movement to place himself in an easy chair near the writing-table.

"I rejoice," he said, "to welcome your Excellency to St. Petersburg, and I beg you to excuse me," he added, with a hasty glance at the general's full uniform, "for receiving you in my morning dress. I expected a private and friendly conversation."

"I have to deliver a letter from my gracious sovereign to his majesty the emperor," replied the general, "and I wished to be ready to appear before his majesty at any moment, of course after I have spoken with your Excellency upon the object of my mission."

The prince bowed slightly.

"The object of your mission is explained in the royal letter?" he inquired.

"It simply accredits me," replied the general, "and refers to my personal explanations of its contents. The political situation is so peculiar that it is impossible for an ambassador to proceed entirely by written instructions."

"Count Redern imparted this to me," said Prince Gortschakoff, "when he informed me of the honour of your visit."

And leaning lightly on the arm of his chair, he looked at the general with an expression of polite attention.

"The king has commanded me," said General Manteuffel, "to lay before your Excellency and

his majesty the emperor the principles that must at the present moment govern the Prussian policy in Germany and in Europe, with the perfect candour and the complete confidence demanded by the close connection between the two royal families, and the friendly relations between the governments."

The prince bowed.

"The success of the Prussian arms," proceeded the general, "the sacrifices which the government and the people have made to attain this success, impose upon Prussia the duty of providing for its own advantage, and also of securing on a firm and lasting basis the new formation of Germany and its national unity. Before all things the recurrence of those difficulties which have just been overcome must be rendered impossible."

The prince was silent, his eyes only expressed courteous attention.

"The king," continued General von Manteuffel, "has accepted the conditions of peace proposed by the French mediation; they are already known to your Excellency, at the same time he has declared that one of the principles which I just now mentioned renders the increase of Prussia's power by territorial acquisitions absolutely imperative, and Austria has already consented to such extension of Prussia in the north."

A half compassionate, half contemptuous smile appeared for a moment on the prince's lips, then his features resumed their expression of calm attention.

"The king," added General Manteuffel, fixing his gaze immoveably upon the eyes of the prince, "the king has now decided that the extension of power necessary for Prussia and Germany will be obtained by the incorporation of Hanover, Hesse Cassel, Nassau, and the town of Frankfort."

The general was silent, as if awaiting a remark from the minister.

Not a feature of the prince's face moved. His eyes looked cordially at the general through his gold spectacles, and those eyes plainly said: "I hear."

General von Manteuffel calmly proceeded.

"The king is deeply and painfully touched by this necessity of causing princely families related to him to undergo the hard lot of the vanquished; his majesty would have struggled against it longer, had not his duty to Prussia and to Germany been victorious in his royal heart over his natural clemency and his regard to family ties."

Again the general appeared to expect an answer, or at least a remark from the prince, but his countenance remained as quiet and unchanged as a portrait, and there was still only one expression visible in it--a firm determination to listen with the most respectful and polite attention to everything that might be said to him.

General von Manteuffel continued:

"The events which have just taken place necessitate various alterations in the European relations prescribed by the treaty of Vienna, and the king therefore holds it needful to lay before his majesty the emperor the constraining principles upon which he acted, and upon which he must continue to act; he especially desires that these principles should find full and complete justification from this government, who in common with Prussia is almost alone in Europe in adhering to the intentions of that treaty."

The prince bowed slightly.

"The treaty of Vienna," he said, shrugging his shoulders, "is scarcely ever spoken of in modern diplomacy."

"His majesty the king," proceeded General von Manteuffel, "is so penetrated by the justice of the principles laid down by that treaty and by the Holy Alliance; he has so deeply complained of Austria's renunciation of that treaty and that alliance, the Prussian policy in the year 1855 testified so strongly to her faithfulness to that treaty, that my most gracious sovereign most ardently desires his majesty the emperor should be convinced that only absolute necessity could induce him to decide on the approaching alterations in Germany, or to permit royal families related to him to feel the hard consequences of war."

"We are acquainted with the consequences that war brings upon the vanquished," said the prince, with quiet courtesy, "for ten years we have borne those consequences on the shores of the Black Sea."

"A misfortune in which Prussia is free from blame," replied General von Manteuffel, "which we have always deeply deplored, the removal of which we should welcome with joy."

The prince was silent, but a slight gleam in his eye showed the watchful general that his words were well received.

He continued:--

"His majesty would deeply regret that the necessities of German policy should in any way alter the bands of friendship, and the perfect confidence subsisting between the courts of Berlin and St. Petersburg. He rather hopes, not only that these will continue to unite Prussia and the newly constituted Germany with Russia, but also that a new, and politically a still stronger basis of alliance between these two powers may in the nature of things be formed."

The prince cast down his eyes for a moment. Then he said in a calm conversational tone:--

"Here we feel--and I assure you the emperor, my most gracious sovereign, feels most of all, the great importance of close and true friendship with Prussia--and I do not doubt," he added, courteously, "that under any circumstances this friendship would ensure an active alliance. Only at the present moment I can scarcely discover its basis. Russia is recovering and collecting herself," he continued, with a shade of greater animation in his voice; "and has no intention of mixing herself up in the affairs of European policy, or in the reconstruction of national groups, so long as Russian interests are not directly and unmistakeably injured. We might," he said, with an expressive look, "complain of alterations in Germany by which royal families, nearly related both to your king and to the emperor, are disinherited; in this circumstance I find it impossible to perceive a motive for more friendly policy, or the foundations for a more practical alliance. Besides, to speak candidly, I think that the new state of affairs in Germany is not calculated to strengthen the political friendship of the court of Berlin with us. You best know how inimical the German movement of 1848 was towards Russia--Germany will scarcely accept entirely the political guidance of Prussia."

"I think your Excellency is mistaken on this point," said General von Manteuffel, with some animation; "the democratic movement of 1848 only used the national ideas as its banner; it beheld in Russia the principle of reaction, and following the lead of its orators, it used hatred to Russia as one of those catch words which move the masses--true national feeling in Germany has no enmity to Russia, and would welcome any accession to her national strength, or to her powerful position in Europe!"

The prince was silent. His features expressed doubt.

General von Manteuffel continued:--

"Permit me, your Excellency, to explain the views which his majesty the king, my master, entertains on this matter, and which, as I need hardly say, are thoroughly shared by the Minister President Count Bismarck."

The prince slightly inclined his head, and listened with the utmost attention.

The general's features kindled, and he spoke in a voice full of conviction.

"History teaches us that all alliances arising from momentary and fleeting political combinations, even though sealed by the most solemn treaties, pass away as quickly as the circumstances that have created them. When, on the contrary, firm political relations between two nations and governments have arisen in the natural course of events, the alliance remains firm through every change of time, and reappears on every practical opportunity, whether founded on treaties or not. The first and most important condition of such a natural combination is a negative one, namely, that the interests of the two states should in no way cross each other, in no way clash. This first and indispensable condition exists in an eminent way in the relations between Prussia and Russia. I am sure your Excellency will agree with me. It is Prussia's mission to act towards the west. The German nation longs for unity, longs for a strong and powerful leader; Prussia's calling, Prussia's noblest ambition is and must ever be, to place this leadership in the strong hand of her king. Prussia must struggle to command the whole of Germany; she cannot rest until she has attained this high aim for herself and the whole nation. What is now gained is a step--an important step--on the great path which Prussia's German policy must pursue--but it is not its completion. But this completion will come; for its greatest hindrance, Austria's power and influence in Germany, is broken--broken for long enough--as I believe, for ever. The path upon which Prussia has entered, which she must pursue to the end, may be crossed by the interests of France, of Italy, of England, but never by those of the grand Russian nation, ever increasing in preponderance and strength. For what is the aim, the legitimate aim, of Russian policy?"

Prince Gortschakoff's keen eyes looked inquiringly at the general's animated countenance; the conversation now approached its most important point.

The general looked down for a moment; then he continued with some slight hesitation:--

"Your Excellency must forgive me, if to you, whose genius inspires and guides the policy of Russia, I venture to describe the aim and object of this policy; nevertheless perfect candour is the foundation of friendship, and in proportion to our comprehension of opposing political problems, we see the reason, the necessity for this friendship."

The prince bowed again in silence, and waited.

"The problem of the great founder of the present Russian monarchy," proceeded General von Manteuffel slowly, as if he sought carefully for the most correct expressions for his thoughts,

"Peter the Great's problem, was the creation of a state possessing European culture, and in order to solve this mighty problem he was forced to establish the seat of his government as near as possible to cultured Europe; he formed canals through which civilization poured in through the veins of his vast kingdom, and made it live and bear fruit. So I understand the choice of St. Petersburg as a capital for new Russia, for with regard to the interior affairs and the resources of the great nation, this spot could never have risen to be its capital. Russia's resources lie, not in the north, not in this distant corner of the empire, they lie in the south, they lie there, where the great national powers of productiveness stream in rich abundance from the soil, they lie there, where the natural course of the world's commerce unites Asia to Europe, those continents to which Russia stretches out her two hands; these resources," he added, after a moment's silence, during which he gazed firmly at the prince, "lie near the Black Sea!"

Some slight emotion passed rapidly over the features of the Russian statesman; involuntarily his eyes turned towards the parchment which von Hamburger had laid before him on the table.

Manteuffel continued:--

"The first great problem which Peter the Great proposed to himself is solved--Russia's broad, gigantic and national organization is saturated with European cultivation, and we must own with some shame that in one century you have outrun the whole of Europe."

"We had only to acquire what Europe had laboriously created," said Prince Gortschakoff politely.

"The last great measure of the Emperor Alexander," continued Manteuffel, "completed the work, and opened even the lowest strata of the people to the living spirit of civilization--in short, the first phase of Russian policy is completed, St. Petersburg has fulfilled its mission. In my opinion the problem of the future is this--to use Russia's internal productiveness as a centre-point for the fruitful development of her national strength, to inspire the organization already created, and to urge it to greater activity. For this you require the Black Sea and its rich basin; there lies the real centre of Russia, there must she develop her future, as the far-seeing eye of the Emperor Nicholas rightly discerned, when he endeavoured to secure the future of Russia in that direction."

Again the prince's eyes glided towards the parchment containing the document so important to Russia.

"But upon this path," said the general, with emphasis, "which I am convinced Russia ought to take, and to pursue to the very end, as we must continue our path in Germany, the Russian interests will never clash with those of Germany; rather shall we rejoice to see our powerful neighbour as fortunately accomplishing her national mission as we hope to accomplish our own."

He was silent, and looked at the prince inquiringly.

He said in a calm tone, with a slight sigh:

"Alas! the sad result of the Crimean war has placed an insurmountable barrier in the path, which your Excellency so brilliantly describes; and----"

"We too," cried Manteuffel, "have been often and long delayed upon our path; nevertheless we never forsook it,--we never gave up the hope of reaching the goal."

The prince was silent a moment. Then he said slowly:

"I agree with your Excellency, that the interests of Prussia, even of the new Prussia and Germany, will not jostle those of Russia. I will not doubt, too, what your Excellency tells me, that the national movement in the Germany of to-day does not inherit the hatred to Russia by which the democratic movement of 1848 was actuated. I regard these assurances with satisfaction, as a guarantee that no cloud will arise between us. Yet with the same candour with which your Excellency has spoken to me, I must say that I cannot perceive how the present situation and (if the lawful claims of treaties are regarded, the lamentable) alterations in the European balance of power can form a stronger political connection--can offer a firmer basis of eventual alliance in the future. You pursue your path with victorious success,--our own is closed for a long time, perhaps for ever."

"Permit me, your Excellency," said General von Manteuffel quickly, "to express myself on this point with the reckless freedom which," he added, laughingly, "you must expect in a soldier fresh from the camp, who only dabbles in diplomacy."

The prince's eyes half closed, and he looked at the general with an expression of good-natured satire.

Manteuffel passed his hand lightly over his moustache, and said:

"The Emperor Napoleon desires compensation for his consent to the new acquisitions of Prussia and the new constitution of Germany."

"Ah!" cried the prince.

"And," proceeded Manteuffel, "they are far from bashful in Paris in pointing out what they shall require as compensation."

"I have not been initiated in this bargaining," said the prince, with a look of great interest and lively anxiety.

"I can inform your Excellency fully," returned General Manteuffel; "they will demand the frontier of 1814, Luxemburg and Mayence."

The prince's face grew still more animated.

"*Will* demand?" he asked.

"The demand is not yet stated officially," replied the general; "Benedetti has only named it in confidence."

"And what did Count Bismarck reply?" asked the prince.

"He put off the discussion of the question and its answer until after the conclusion of peace with Austria."

The prince gave a fine smile and a slight nod with his head.

"I can, however, tell your Excellency the answer beforehand," said the general.

"And it will be?" asked the prince.

"Not a foot's breadth of land, not a fortress,--no compensation," said General Manteuffel, in a firm, clear voice.

Prince Gortschakoff looked at him with surprise, as if he had not expected this short and simple answer.

"And what will France do?" he asked.

The general shrugged his shoulders.

"Perhaps declare war," he replied,--"perhaps be prudently silent, wait, and arm; any way, it will be a sharp disappointment, and war must be the final result."

The prince looked at this man with astonishment, who had just discussed with such fine intellect all the aims and threads of political interests, and who now, with soldier-like bluntness, spoke as of an ordinary event, of a war whose thunders must shake Europe to its very foundations.

"That is the situation," said Manteuffel; "I beg your Excellency's permission to express my views on its consequences, and the position of Russia with regard to them."

"I am most curious to hear!" said the prince.

"The situation I have just described," proceeded the general, "gives Russia the power of deciding for all future time the relations that shall exist between that empire and Germany. If the Russian policy uses adverse circumstances to make difficulties for us, this policy,--forgive me, your Excellency, I must touch on every possibility to make my views clear,--this policy, even though it secures success to France for a time, will not prevent the regeneration of Germany; and under all future circumstances--for ever--Prussia and Germany will regard Russia as a foe, who is ready to come to an understanding with the western powers upon the affairs of Europe, and to make their interests her own."

General von Manteuffel spoke in a firm and decided voice, and fixed his eyes firmly on the vice-chancellor.

The prince's eyes fell, and he bit his lips.

"I beg your Excellency to forgive me," said the general, "for having touched upon an eventuality, which is doubtless far removed from your enlightened policy. I now come to the other course--namely, that Russia, according to the old traditions of the two courts, shall regard the enlargement of Prussia with friendly and favourable eyes, and shall make use of the present opportunity to arrange with new Germany the foundations of that close connection which, according to my convictions, ought to exist in future, and which will so greatly further the interests of both nations. The compensation being refused," he proceeded, "France will probably declare war immediately,--we do not fear her; at this moment the whole of Germany would unite and accept war without hesitation, especially if we had Russia as a well-wisher to back us. But Russia can have no more favourable opportunity for breaking the bann which the treaty of 1856 laid upon her development and her natural and needful aims. Whilst we hold France in check, no one will prevent you from bursting asunder the unnatural chains with which the western allied

powers, in conjunction with ungrateful Austria, fettered you upon the Black Sea, that spot where lies the future of Russia."

The prince's eyes brightened, his features expressed a smiling consent to the ideas so forcibly and convincingly unfolded by General von Manteuffel.

He continued:

"If, however, as I personally believe will be the case, France, who has already let the right moment go by----"

Prince Gortschakoff several times nodded his head.

"If France," said the general, "is silent for the present, assembles her forces, and arms, our position is even better, because it is more certain. During the period of suspense which will precede the inevitable war, we gain time to bind the national strength of Germany more strongly and closely together, and you have time to complete your preparations in the south and west, and to form ties across the ocean which will, under any circumstances, secure to you your natural confederates."

"General," said the prince, smiling; "you have comprehensively and successfully studied the affairs of Russia."

"Because I love Russia," replied the general, with perfect frankness; "and because I regard a close and indissoluble friendship between Russia and Germany as the salvation of Europe in the future. But I am coming to a conclusion. When, after a longer or a shorter interval from the reconstruction of Germany, a decisive war breaks out with France, then that alliance of the western powers so prejudicial to you falls to pieces; you will have nothing to do, except to hold in check Austria's desire for revenge, and you will obtain perfect freedom again to open the Black Sea to your national interests, and your national progress. We, as we press onwards on the path leading to our national aims, shall behold with joy the swift and mighty strides which Russia will make in the fulfilment of her national destiny. Yes," he continued, "we will at all times and in every way support you. Could I for a moment doubt what decision would be made by so enlightened a policy as your own, I would say,--'Choose, your Excellency, whether two states, whose interests can never be inimical, shall mutually harass each other--or whether by a perfect and close understanding they shall support each other in gaining the powerful position that nature assigns them--whether hand in hand they shall guide the fate of Europe?'"

He ceased and looked at the prince in suspense.

From his face all trace of the cold reserve he had assumed at the commencement of the interview had completely vanished. A deep earnestness appeared on his features. His gaze rested on the Prussian ambassador.

"My dear general," he said, in a firm, clear voice, "if the principles and the views which you have so candidly, so warmly, and so convincingly stated are those of your government----"

"They are in every respect those of my gracious sovereign, and of his ministers," said Manteuffel, calmly and decidedly.

"Then," replied the prince, "I will tell you with the same frankness, that in all fundamental principles our judgment on the present state of affairs perfectly coincides with your own."

A flash of joy shone in the general's deep grave eyes.

"It only remains," said the prince, "to use these common principles and views in practical arrangements, and to make them the firm basis of common action in the future."

"I am ready to do this at any moment," said the general.

"But first of all," continued the prince, "we must gain the consent of his majesty the emperor to, our agreement; if it is agreeable to you, let us drive at once to Zarskoë Selo. You will have the trouble," he said, smiling, "of repeating to the emperor what you have just said to me."

General von Manteuffel bowed.

"I hope," he said, "that my devotion to my country, and my honest love to Russia, will give my words clearness and conviction."

Prince Gortschakoff rang.

"Order the carriage," he said to the groom of the chambers.

"Will you excuse me for a moment," said he to General von Manteuffel, "I shall be ready to accompany you immediately."

He withdrew by a side door. Manteuffel walked to the window and looked thoughtfully through the panes.

After five minutes the prince returned. He wore his ministerial undress uniform, the broad orange ribbon of the Black Eagle beneath his coat, and upon his breast the star of this highest Prussian Order, above the star of the Order of Andreas.

The groom of the chambers opened the door.

"Precede me, I beg," said the minister, with a courteous movement, "I am at home."

General von Manteuffel left the room and awaited the prince who followed him.

* * * * *

Late in the afternoon of the same day the splendour of the evening sun flooded the magically beautiful park surrounding the imperial palace of Zarskoë Selo; that park of which it is said, that a fallen leaf is never allowed to remain on the well-kept roads, that magnificent creation of the first Catharine, which a succession of mighty autocrats have embellished until it has attained the charms of Fairyland.

General von Knesebeck appeared from one of the side doors of the enormous castle, which with its ornaments of gilded bronze, and its colossal caryatides glittered in the rays of the setting sun from amidst dark masses of lofty trees. He had arrived that morning at Zarskoë Selo at the emperor's command, and he awaited an audience, during which he was to deliver a letter to the emperor from his king, who had sent the general to beg Alexander II. to interfere on his behalf.

Grave and sad, the general walked through the glorious alleys, lost in gloomy thought. The distinguished attention with which he had been received, the equipages and servants placed at his disposal, had not removed the impression made on him, both from his conversation with Prince Gortschakoff, and from the remarks of gentlemen about the court, that there was little hope for his king. They had all expressed sympathy and interest; but in the atmosphere of a court there is a certain fluid, always perceptible to those accustomed to such circles, from which they can almost always tell beforehand whether or no a mission will be successful.

The general had not approved of the policy of the Hanoverian court, his quick eyes had perceived the weakness of Austria, and he had deeply deplored the unaccountable command of the Hanoverian army during its short campaign. Many ties bound him to Prussia, and with his whole heart he grasped the thought of a United Germany; but he was a true servant to his king, and deep grief overwhelmed him when he thought of the future that was now inevitable, unless his mission attained success.

He walked slowly on, farther and farther, lost in thought.

Suddenly an artistically contrived ruin, producing an excellent effect, arose before him in the solitude, amongst lofty trees. He went up to it, a doorkeeper in the imperial livery obsequiously opened the door after glancing at the general's uniform, and he entered a lofty circular space lighted only from above, dark, severe, and simple, an English chapel. Before him in exquisite Carara marble rose a figure of Christ, Dannecker's marvellously beautiful creation. The Saviour with one hand points to his breast, the other is raised with inexpressible grandeur towards heaven.

The general stood still for a long time before this affecting figure.

"We must lay our sorrows on the Saviour's divine breast, and humbly await wisdom from heaven," he whispered, "does a secret warning draw me hither now, and lead me to this beautiful and holy image?"

Overcome by the powerful impression made upon him by this work of genius, he folded his hands and stood before it for some time.

He slightly moved his lips as he said:

"If the wheel of fate, as it rolls along unceasingly, must crush so much in its path, grant at least that the German Fatherland may gain might and greatness, and the German people happiness, from the struggles and the sufferings of the days that are gone!"

With a long look at the sculptured figure he turned away, and passing by the door-keeper, he returned to the park.

He walked again towards the palace, and stood still before the large lake, compelled by art to flow out from between the two halves of the castle, and to fall down in waterfalls with many cascades. Here is the so-called Admiralty, where the grand dukes exercise themselves in building the models of ships; near the pretty landing place boats are crowded from all the five divisions of the world; the Turkish kaik, the Chinese junk, the Russian tschelónok, and the whaling boat of the Greenlander, lie side by side, and skilful sailors in the emperor's employment are at the disposal of those who wish to embark.

The general was looking at this interesting and varied picture, when a servant approached him

hurriedly, and informed him that an equerry had just come to his rooms to lead him to the emperor.

With quick footsteps and hastily drawn breath, the general went back to his apartments, and after donning scarf and plumed hat, hurried with the equerry along the large and magnificent terrace leading to the part of the palace inhabited by the emperor.

In the ante-chamber there was only a groom of the chambers, who immediately opened the door of the emperor's room. The equerry after simply announcing him, requested General Knesebeck to enter.

In the brightly lighted apartment, with large windows leading out upon the terrace, and the mild aromatic summer air streaming in through them, stood the lofty form of Alexander the Second. He wore the uniform of a Russian general, his perfect features, always grave and even melancholy, showed emotion, and his large expressive eyes gazed at the general with a look of deep sorrow. He advanced a step towards Knesebeck and said in his full, melodious voice, in the purest German:

"You come late, general; nevertheless, I rejoice to see you here, a true servant to your king."

And he held out his hand to the general, who seized it respectfully, and with deep feeling.

"If it might be possible," he said, "for me to be of service to my master so severely smitten by fate! But first of all I must discharge my commission;" he drew a sealed letter from his uniform; "and place this communication from my king in the mighty hands of your imperial majesty."

Alexander took the letter, seated himself in an easy, chair, and pointed to a seat near, where the general placed himself.

The emperor opened the letter and read its contents slowly and attentively.

For a moment he looked down sorrowfully, then he fixed his penetrating eyes upon the general and spoke.

"Have you anything more to say to me?"

"I have to add," said von Knesebeck, "that his majesty the king my gracious master, fully acknowledging the completeness of events that have made the King of Prussia the conqueror in Germany, is ready to conclude peace with his Prussian majesty and to accept the conditions made unavoidable by necessity. My gracious sovereign expressed this in a letter he wrote to his majesty King William, but the letter was refused. The king hopes, well knowing your majesty's tried friendship, that you will undertake to mediate, and to preserve him from the hard measures already spoken of by the public newspapers."

The emperor sighed deeply and looked on the ground.

"My dear General," he then said, "you have come too late. I have indeed the most affectionate and honest friendship for the king, and from my soul I wished to see the sad conflict avoided whose unhappy consequences are now being accomplished. I have endeavoured to work in this spirit, it has been in vain. I must be quite frank with you," he continued, "the position of affairs demands it. The wish of my heart to be useful to your king is opposed by an unalterable political necessity, which King William, my uncle, deplores as deeply as I do myself."

The general sighed. His face quivered with pain and tears shone in his eyes.

The emperor looked at him for some time with an expression of deep sorrow and affectionate sympathy.

"I scarcely venture," he then said in a gentle voice, "to make the only proposition to you that the circumstances permit, and which if the king accepts it, I am sure I can prevail upon the King of Prussia to grant; if the king will abdicate," he proceeded with hesitation, "the Brunswick succession shall be secured to the Crown Prince Ernest Augustus."

The general was silent for a moment.

"Thus," said he, "must the house of Guelph be reduced to its cradle and its oldest inheritance! Will your majesty permit me to lay this proposition to which I am not in a position to reply, before my king at once?"

"I request you will do so," said the emperor, "you will," he added, "have no cipher at hand, send the despatch to Count Stackelberg, he can also receive the answer under his cipher."

"At your majesty's command," said General von Knesebeck.

"Be convinced," said the emperor in a hearty tone, "that I feel the deepest and warmest sympathy for your king; may God make the future of his family as happy as possible, and if I can help him in any way, I am ready to do so. Though the occasion is sad, I am glad that I have had the opportunity of making your acquaintance, my dear general."

He took his hand and pressed it heartily.

Then he rang and called his equerry.

"Take the despatch which the general will give you to Prince Gortschakoff at once. It must be sent in cipher to my ambassador in Vienna immediately. The answer must be sent here to the general without delay."

With a low bow General von Knesebeck left the cabinet.

An hour later the electric wire bore his despatch to Vienna.

The night fell; restless and sleepless the general watched the sun which only at midnight sank for a short time below the horizon, and soon reappeared, mingling the twilight of evening with the morning dawn.

At noon a secretary arrived from Prince Gortschakoff and brought him a sealed letter.

The general hastily broke the seal with its large double eagles, and in the neatest handwriting saw the reply to his despatch.

It ran thus:

"The king cannot trade upon the succession to Brunswick, which will devolve upon himself and his heirs, by right of family inheritance, and the lawful transmission of land. He is however ready to abdicate immediately, provided the government of the kingdom of Hanover is guaranteed to the Crown Prince."

"I expected this," said the general with a sigh.

And sticking the paper into his uniform, he seized his plumed hat, and descended the stairs to the carriage already waiting to convey him to the Emperor Alexander.

CHAPTER XXIII.

THE MARSHALS OF FRANCE.

Again the Emperor Napoleon sat in his cabinet at the Tuileries, but his wearied and anxious features no longer expressed content and calm security. A short sojourn at the baths of Vichy had not strengthened his health, and the political situation had not answered his expectations. Gloom and gravity overspread his face, he supported his elbows on his knees and bent down his head, slightly twisting the points of his moustache with his left hand, whilst listening to the report of the minister of foreign affairs, who sat before him.

Monsieur Drouyn de Lhuys was extremely excited, a pale flush was upon his usually quiet countenance, and in his keen and brilliant eyes shone a fire only repressed by a strong effort of will.

"Sire," he said, "your majesty beholds the result of the uncertain and vacillating policy I have so long implored you to abandon. Had your majesty prevented the war between Prussia and Austria, or had you marched the army to the Rhine a month ago, either the present difficult position could not have arisen, or France would have gained that which, from the new constitution of Germany, she *must have*. Our situation now is most painful, and it will cost us double the effort successfully to uphold the interests of France."

The emperor raised his head a little, and from beneath his drooping eyelashes stole a look at the excited face of his minister.

"Do you think," he said, "that in Berlin they will really refuse our demands for compensation? Mayence we might perhaps abandon, if it ceases to be a fortress, or is reduced to a fortress of the second rank, but would they dare--?"

He paused.

"I am convinced," said Drouyn de Lhuys, "that they will give us *nothing* of their own free-will. Peace with Austria is concluded, the Prussian army is free to march where it lists, and as it is prepared for war it has a great advantage over us; from Russia too the reports are very unfavourable, the feeling of displeasure in St. Petersburg has given place to extreme reserve, and during the last few days all Baron Talleyrand's remarks upon the dangers of a united military

Germany have been met with evasive answers. Benedetti's short announcement leaves us in no doubt as to how his propositions were received in Berlin. We must make the greatest exertions."

Again the emperor looked up with a thoughtful gaze. He drew out his watch.

"Benedetti must have returned this morning, I am anxious to hear his report myself," he said.

"He will have gone to the Quai d'Orsay," returned Drouyn de Lhuys.

The curtain which hung over the door leading to the private secretary's room moved, and Piétri's fine intelligent head appeared from behind the portière.

"Sire," he said, "Monsieur Benedetti is here, and asks whether your majesty is inclined to receive him?"

"Immediately!" said the emperor with animation, "bring him here!"

A minute afterwards the portière opened and the ambassador entered the cabinet.

He was in black morning dress, his pale features showed traces of fatigue from his journey, his eyes shone with nervous excitement.

He bowed deeply to the emperor, and shook hands with Drouyn de Lhuys.

"I have expected you with impatience," said Napoleon, "be seated, and tell me how matters stand in Berlin."

"Sire," said Benedetti, as he took a chair, and placed himself opposite to the emperor and Drouyn de Lhuys, "I had driven to the Quai d'Orsay to announce myself to the minister, and as I heard he was here, I took the liberty of coming at once."

"You were right," said the emperor, "you now find the whole apparatus of the constitutional government together," he added laughingly; "relate,--I listen with impatience."

Monsieur Benedetti drew a deep breath and said:

"As your majesty is aware, I laid the sketch of the treaty which I received from Vichy before Count Bismarck, in a confidential conversation, immediately after his return to Berlin."

"And--?" asked the emperor.

"Any compensation, but above all the cession of Mayence, he plainly and roundly--refused."

"Your majesty perceives," said Drouyn de Lhuys.

The emperor twisted his moustache and his head sank.

"I produced," continued Benedetti, "all the reasons which make it our imperative duty at this moment to demand compensation for France, I laid before him the regard we must have to public opinion in France, I insisted how small was the compensation demanded, in comparison to the large acquisitions of Prussia, how militarily concentrated Germany owed France a guarantee of peace for the future: all was in vain,--the minister president was obstinate in his refusal, and only repeated again and again, that the national feeling in Germany would not bear such compensation."

The emperor was silent.

"Two days afterwards," proceeded Benedetti, "I had a second interview with Count Bismarck--it had the same result. I pointed out in the most careful way that the refusal of our just demands might endanger the future good understanding between Prussia and France, and the only result of this intimation was that Count Bismarck as carefully, yet in a manner not to be misunderstood, hinted that though he perceived this danger he must persist in his refusal, and that he was not to be frightened from his determination even by the most extreme measures. I must however remark," added the ambassador, "that our conversation never for a moment overstepped the bounds of courtesy or even of friendship, and that Count Bismarck repeatedly told me how greatly he desired a continuance of a good understanding with France, and how convinced he was that in the new state of affairs the interests of France and Germany in Europe would have so many points in common, that a friendly policy on each side would be determined upon by both governments after due consideration. I considered it better under these circumstances," said Benedetti after a short pause, during which the emperor remained silent, "not to carry on the discussion any farther, but to return here at once, and to make a personal report upon the negotiation, and the position of affairs in Berlin."

Drouyn de Lhuys bit his lips. The emperor raised his eyes slowly, and looked at Monsieur Benedetti enquiringly.

"And do you think," he asked, "that public opinion in Prussia and in Germany, will take Count Bismarck's part, if he dares to provoke a war with France--do you think that the king?--"

"Sire," said Benedetti with energy, "that is what I especially desired personally to impart to your majesty, in order that you may make no decision without a perfect knowledge of the situation. The war with Austria," he proceeded, "was unpopular in Prussia itself, and had it been disastrous, serious commotions would have arisen in the interior; nevertheless, I cannot conceal from your majesty, that success has borne its accustomed fruit. The Prussian people feel as if aroused from slumber; the aims of the minister president, now clearly revealed to all eyes, the firmness and daring energy with which he politically followed up their military success, find not only approval, they call forth general enthusiasm. Count Bismarck is the popular idol in Prussia, and if anything could raise his popularity to a higher pinnacle, it would be a war caused by his refusal to alienate German soil. The army, the generals, and the princes of the royal family fully share these views; in military circles, indeed, they are expressed more vehemently and more decidedly. The king would not for a moment flinch from such a war. Such is the state of affairs which regard to truth compels me to divulge to your majesty."

"But Germany--vanquished, but not annihilated Germany?" asked Drouyn de Lhuys, as the emperor still remained silent.

"Of course I cannot be so perfectly acquainted with the opinions of the rest of Germany as I am with those of Berlin," said Benedetti; "but I have attentively perused the newspapers, and I have spoken of the feeling in Germany to persons certain to be well informed: the result of my observations is, that at this moment not a single German government would dare to side with France against Prussia, and the German people (of this I am sure) would--with some few exceptions, which are certain to be instantly suppressed,--place themselves on the side of Prussia. We should have all Germany against us."

"France must fear no enemy, when her honour and her interests are at stake!" cried Drouyn de Lhuys proudly.

Benedetti looked on the ground, and said, with some hesitation,--

"I must also impart to your majesty, that I hear from a source which for a long time past has supplied me with true and important intelligence, and which is known to your majesty,--I hear that a secret treaty is concluded between Prussia and the South German states, which in case of war delivers the armies of these states to the King of Prussia as their Commander-in-Chief."

"Impossible!" cried the emperor vehemently as he rose, "it would make the Treaty of Peace an illusion!"

"Our representatives at the South German courts tell us nothing about this," said Drouyn de Lhuys.

"I believe my information is true," said Benedetti, calmly.

The emperor stood up. Both the gentlemen rose at the same moment. Drouyn de Lhuys looked at his sovereign in anxious suspense.

"My dear Benedetti," said Napoleon with charming kindness, "you are tired after your exhausting journey, I beg you will rest yourself thoroughly. I thank you for your communications, and for the zeal you have shown in making them to me personally. To-morrow I will see you again and will give you further instructions."

And with engaging courtesy he held out his hand to Benedetti.

The ambassador bowed deeply and withdrew by the door leading to Piétri's room.

"Your majesty is now convinced," said Drouyn de Lhuys, "that our propositions are refused."

Napoleon drew himself up proudly, his features expressed energy and determination, his eyes were widely opened, and courage flashed in his clear glance.

"Now for action," said he.

The minister's face shone with joy.

"France will thank your majesty for this decision," he cried.

The emperor rang.

"General Fleury," he cried to the groom of the chambers as he entered.

The general's strong lean form, with his animated, expressive countenance, large moustache, and Henri Quatre beard, appeared a moment afterwards in the cabinet.

"Are the marshals assembled?" asked Napoleon.

"At your majesty's command."

Drouyn de Lhuys gazed with surprise at the emperor.

He responded with a smile.

"You shall be convinced, my dear minister," said he, "that I have not been idle, and that I have thought of preparing for the action you hold to be needful. You will, I hope, be satisfied with me. I beg you to accompany me."

And leaving the cabinet, followed by the minister, he walked through an anteroom, and entered a large salon richly yet simply decorated, in the midst of which stood a table surrounded by fauteuils.

Here were assembled the highest dignitaries of the French army, the bearers of that honour, so highly prized for centuries, wrestled for with so much blood--the marshal's baton of France.

There was the grey-haired Marshal Vaillant, looking more like a courtier than a soldier; the snow-white, brave, and military-looking Count Regnault de St. Jean d'Angely; Canrobert, with his long hair, resembling a philosopher rather than a warrior; Count Baraguay d'Hilliers, elegant and chivalrous, notwithstanding his age; the minister of war, Count Randon; the slender MacMahon, all muscle and nerve, with his gentle face and quick bright eyes; there was Niel, with his earnest, intelligent countenance, showing signs of sickness and suffering, but bearing also the stamp of unyielding energy and of an iron will; there was Marshal Forey, with his stiff, military carriage.

The youngest of the marshals, Bazaine, was wanting: he was in Mexico, preparing to leave the unhappy Emperor Maximilian to his tragic fate. All the marshals were in plain black civilian dress.

The emperor returned the low bow of the assembly by a greeting full of graceful dignity. With a firm step he walked towards the head of the table, and placed himself in the arm-chair which stood there, commanding the marshals, by a sign with his hand, also to be seated.

Drouyn de Lhuys sat opposite to the emperor; on his right hand, Marshal Vaillant; on his left, Count Baraguay d'Hilliers; the others according to their seniority.

"I have assembled you here, messieurs mes maréchals," began Napoleon, in a firm voice, "even the gentlemen who hold foreign commands, even you, Duc de Magenta, I have called hither, because, at the present grave moment, I desire to receive the advice, and to hear the views of the trusty leaders of the French army."

The marshals looked at the emperor full of expectation.

"You all know," said Napoleon, "the events which have just been accomplished in Germany. Prussia, misusing her victory at Sadowa, is creating a German military state, continually to threaten the frontiers of France. I did not consider myself justified in interfering in the inner development of Germany. The German nation has the same right freely to reconstitute itself as France claims, and as all foreign nations allow to her; but as the sovereign of France, it was my duty to care for the safety of her frontier, menaced by the increased strength of Germany. For this cause, I opened negotiations to obtain for France that frontier which would secure her natural and strategical defence--the frontier of 1814--Mayence and Luxemburg."

The emperor allowed his eyes to glide over the assembly. He seemed to expect joyful and animated applause.

But grave and silent the marshals sat, with downcast looks; even MacMahon's bright eyes did not kindle with joy at the prospect of war expressed in the emperor's words.

Napoleon proceeded:

"I have sounded them in Berlin, and it appears that they are not disposed to accede to the just claims I thought it needful to make in the name of France. Before I go further, and bring matters to an ultimatum, I wish to hear your views upon a war with Prussia, the greatest and the gravest war that France could undertake."

Drouyn de Lhuys looked up impatiently. This was not the turn he wished matters to take.

"I know," said the emperor, whose quick eyes had perceived the gloomy looks of his marshals, and whose natural moderation inclined him to prudence; "I know that France is always armed, and strong enough to repel every attack; but before we begin a war of such immense importance, we must be quite clear as to our strength, and readiness for battle. I therefore pray you, gentlemen, to give me your opinions as to the probable result of a war with Germany, and upon the way in which such a war must be carried out."

Old Marshal Vaillant looked down before him thoughtfully.

"Sire," he then said, with grave calmness, "twenty years ago my heart would have beat high at the thought of such a war--revenge for Waterloo!--now the prudence of old age is victorious over the fire of youth, over the throbs of my French heart. Before we decide so grave, so important a question, it will be needful to ascertain by a commission, the state of the army and the means at our disposal for offensive war, and for the defence of the country, to consider the influence of

Prussia's new weapon upon tactics, and thus to form a well-grounded judgment. I cannot venture at once to decide a question so deeply affecting the fate of France. If I am too prudent," he added, "I beg your majesty to blame not me, but my years."

Count Baraguay d'Hilliers and Marshal Canrobert signified their assent to the views expressed by Vaillant.

The minister of war, Count Randon, said:--

"I believe that the condition of the army, to which I have devoted all my care, is excellent, and that the means of defence throughout the country are in the best possible state; nevertheless, I am the last person in the world to disapprove of an examination, which will to a certain extent control my administration as minister of war--a careful examination upon the influence of the needle-gun I most urgently advise."

The grey-haired Count Regnault de St. Jean d'Angely said, in a firm voice,--

"Sire, I have the great honour of commanding your majesty's guards. This corps is in perfect readiness to march against the enemies of France. If your majesty declared war to-day, the guards could start for the frontier to-morrow, full of zeal to twine fresh laurels round our ancient eagle. But we cannot carry on a war with the guards alone. I must therefore entirely agree with the views of Marshal Vaillant."

Drouyn de Lhuys shrugged his shoulders with impatience, which he scarcely troubled himself to conceal. The emperor looked thoughtfully before him.

"Sire," said MacMahon, in his voice so gentle in conversation, but which in front of his troops resounded metallic as a trumpet blast--"Sire, your majesty knows I would rather see my sword flash in the sunshine against the enemies of France than wear it in its scabbard, yet I must fully concur in the wise view of Marshal Vaillant. Let us examine--let us examine quickly, and then as quickly do that which is needful."

Slowly Marshal Niel raised his eyes, so full of genius, to the emperor. He hesitated for a moment, then he spoke in a calm, firm tone:--

"I must beg our honoured *doyen's* forgiveness if I, so much younger than himself, am of a different opinion."

The marshals all looked at the speaker with astonishment. Drouyn de Lhuys, with joyful expectation, hung on his lips. The emperor raised his head and looked at him in the greatest suspense.

"Sire," he added, his features growing animated, "I do not consider a commission needful, because without an examination my opinion is formed."

"And your opinion is?" asked Napoleon.

"My opinion is that your majesty is not in a position to fight."

Drouyn de Lhuys looked at Niel with horror. The emperor showed no emotion, only he cast down his eyes and bent his head a little to one side, as was his custom when he listened with unusual attention.

"Sire," proceeded Kiel, "if one who wears the marshal's baton of France, in such an assemblage, before his monarch, expresses such an opinion as my own, it is his duty to give the reasons upon which it is founded. Allow me to do this on their principal points. I am ready hereafter to lay my reasons before your majesty in a special memorial. Firstly," he continued, "a war against Prussia and Germany--for I believe in this case Germany would stand beside Prussia--needs the whole and entire force of the French nation. At the present moment this is not at our command. The expedition to Mexico draws away both men and money which we could not spare, and I should not wish that, following the example of Austria, we engaged upon two wars at once, when opposed to a foe whose dangerous strength we must, above all things, duly estimate if we hope for success. Secondly," he added, "according to my opinion, no examination is necessary to convince us that we must oppose to the Prussian needle-gun a weapon at least as good, if not superior. I venture to doubt whether, as they now affirm in Austria, it was entirely the needle-gun that Prussia must thank for her great and astonishing success. I doubt it; nevertheless, apart from the undoubted efficacy of this weapon, it is absolutely necessary for the *morale* and self-confidence of our soldiers, to give them a needle-gun of an equally good or superior kind, especially now that the newspapers and common rumour have surrounded this gun with the nimbus of a magic weapon. I should hold it to be extremely dangerous to lead the army, as it is at present equipped, against Prussian regiments. A new weapon, sire, necessitates new tactics. I will only allude to the completely altered functions of cavalry in war, and the new problem of artillery,--on which your majesty's views will be clearer than my own," he added, bowing to the emperor. "Then," he proceeded, "without any commission, it is perfectly clear that the strongholds on our frontier have neither the fortifications, the provisions, nor the ammunition needful to make them really effective in war. This is no reflection upon the military administration," he said, turning to Count Randon; "it is a fact whose full explanation is found in

the circumstance that the state of politics during the last few years has directed our military attention to other points. Finally," he said in a convincing tone, "there is one point to consider, which I believe to be the most important of all. We have opposed to us in Prussia a nation whose military organization causes every man up to a great age to be a soldier. In case of need Prussia can, after a lost battle, after the annihilation even of an army upon the field, produce another army in an effective condition, with all the discipline and all the requisites of well-trained soldiers. I will not speak of the influence such an excessive expenditure of strength must have on home affairs--on the welfare of the country, but in a military point of view its success is immense. We have but our regular army, and were it broken, defeated--in the quiet contemplation of affairs it is the duty even of a French mouth to pronounce this hard word--we have nothing--except perhaps, undisciplined masses with a good courage, who would be sacrificed without result. I will not maintain that it would be advisable, or, indeed, with our national peculiarities, that it would be possible to imitate the Prussian system, nevertheless we must create something which will be a true national reserve. I wish to express that we must have, to back up our regular army, material sufficiently trained to form another army in case of need, if we would avoid entering on the war with unequal forces. I will shortly recapitulate my opinion. We must, in the first place, be completely freed from Mexico, that we may be able to concentrate the whole power of France upon one point. We must then supply the whole army with an excellent breach-loader; we must modify our drill to our new weapon; our fortresses must be in perfect readiness for war. Finally, we must create a mobile and efficient national reserve. I consider all these preparations indispensable before commencing so grave and decisive a war."

Deep silence reigned for a moment throughout the apartment.

The emperor fixed his eyes upon Marshal Forey, the youngest in the assembly.

"I perfectly coincide in the views that Marshal Niel has so clearly and convincingly expressed," he said.

The other marshals were silent, but their looks plainly showed that they had nothing to say against the views Niel had advanced.

"Sire," cried Drouyn de Lhuys, vehemently, "I am not a soldier, and I am convinced that from a military point of view the gallant marshal is perfectly right; but the completion of the preparations he deems needful for a successful campaign requires time, much time, and I think we have none to lose if we are to guard the honour and the interests of France. The favourable moment will go by, Prussia will grow stronger and stronger, the military strength of Germany will become more and more organized and concentrated, and if all is carried out that the marshal desires, the increase to our strength, however important, will perhaps be met by a still more considerable increase of strength on the part of the enemy. Sire," he proceeded, with extreme excitement and with flashing eyes, "I implore your majesty that two men and one officer with the banner of France, may stand at the frontier and support the needful demands which we must make upon Prussia; if they see we are in earnest in Berlin they will yield, and if they do not, in a few days all France would be formed into battalions to strengthen our armies. It was with such battalions, sire, that your illustrious uncle conquered the world; from these he formed those mighty armies, educated not in the barrack-yard but on the battle-field, with which he subdued Europe."

A deeply pained expression appeared for a moment on the emperor's face.

Then he raised his eyes enquiringly to Marshal Niel.

"What do you say to this, Monsieur le Maréchal?" he asked.

"Sire," replied Niel, "your minister's words must find an echo in every French heart, and my strong conviction of my duty towards your majesty and France alone prevents me from agreeing with him. Immediately after the battle of Sadowa, whilst Germany was still armed, when Austria had not yet concluded peace, when the Prussian army was still much exhausted by the hard blows it had received during a severe struggle, it might have been possible to do what the minister counsels. To-day it would be too dangerous a game for France's glory and greatness; it would be," he added, with a meaning look at the emperor, "a game which your majesty might perhaps dare to play, but which no conscientious general would dare to advise."

"And if I dare to play this game," cried the emperor, a brilliant flash sparkling in his eyes, "which of you gentlemen would stand at my side and lead the armies of France?"

A deep silence replied to the emperor's question.

"Sire," at last cried Marshal MacMahon, fixing his bright blue eyes firmly on the emperor, "we are all ready, if you command, to march at the head of the armies of France, and to die; but first we beg your majesty to listen to Marshal Niel, and not to hazard the fate of France, of imperial France, to such uncertain success."

All the marshals bent their heads, and their countenances expressed their full approval of the Duke of Magenta's words.

Drouyn de Lhuys allowed his head to sink sorrowfully upon his breast.

The emperor fixed his eyes upon Marshal Niel without a sign of emotion.

"How long a time should you require to carry out what you have asserted to be needful?"

"Two years, sire," replied the marshal, in a calm, clear voice.

"My best wishes will accompany the marshal in his work, if your majesty deputes him to carry it out," said Count Randon, bowing to the emperor.

After a few moments of deep silence Napoleon rose.

"I thank you, gentlemen," he said, quietly, "for your opinions, and the frankness with which you have expressed them. It will make it easier to me to form a decision at this important moment. I shall see you all again to-day at dinner."

And with his own peculiar courtesy he greeted them, and returned to his cabinet alone.

He looked thoughtfully and gravely before him, and several times paced slowly up and down the room.

"Rash indeed would it be to decide on action under these circumstances," said he; "and wherefore, if time can ripen the fruit, if waiting can make our aim more sure? Drouyn de Lhuys, that quiet prudent man, talks like a Jacobin of 1793! He holds intercourse with Orleans," he said, gloomily, as he stood still and fixed his eyes on the ground.

Then he went to his writing-table, seated himself and wrote. His hand hurried over the paper; sometimes he looked up as if seeking for a word, then he wrote again, filling one page after another.

When he had finished he called Piétri.

"Make me a copy of this," said the emperor, holding out the written sheets; "yet," he added, "read it first and tell me what you think of it."

Piétri read slowly and attentively, whilst the emperor made a cigarette, lighted it at the taper always burning on his table, and then walked leisurely up and down the room, from time to time casting a look of enquiry at his secretary's countenance.

When he saw that he had finished reading he said:

"Well, have you any remark to make?"

"Sire," said Piétri, "your majesty will not then act?"

"Perhaps it is better to wait," said the emperor.

"But this programme," said Piétri,--"for, what your majesty has just sketched out is a political programme for the future--accepts the alterations in Germany."

"Accepts them," said the emperor; and half speaking to himself he added, "to accept is not to acknowledge--to accept indicates a fictitious position which we permit to continue as long as we will."

"I admire, as I have often done before, the dexterity with which your majesty chooses your words," said Piétri. "But," he proceeded, "this theory of nonintervention, this declaration that the three portions into which Germany is dividing completely reassure us as to the interests of France, will not accord with the views of M. Drouyn de Lhuys. I do not believe he will accept this programme without discussion."

The emperor looked steadfastly at his secretary.

"I cannot compel him to do so," he then said.

"And your majesty is firmly determined to abide by this programme."

"Firmly determined?" said the emperor, thoughtfully. "How difficult it is to decide at such a time. Do you know, Piétri," he said, as he laid his hand upon his shoulder, "determination is something that hurts my nerves; I do not know fear,--danger makes me cold and calm; but I am always thankful to those who compel me by an impulse to do what is needful to be done. Make me the copy,--I will drive out."

CHAPTER XXIV.

THE EMPRESS CHARLOTTE.

Monsieur Piétri finished his business with Napoleon the next morning, and rose to withdraw to his own room.

The emperor looked down gravely.

"I must visit the Empress Charlotte," he said in a low tone.

"The poor empress! she is indeed to be pitied," remarked Piétri.

"Why does she cling so madly to that absurd Mexican crown?" cried Napoleon. "Can I uphold the Emperor Maximilian on a throne which he has himself undermined with his liberal ideas? He has estranged himself from the Church party, and has deeply offended the clergy, the only power that can lead the masses out there, and above all, that can get him money, which he needs so greatly; for without money he will soon have neither troops, nor generals, nor ministers, nor friends. Ought I," he continued after a pause, "ought I to continue pouring into this Mexican abyss streams of French blood and French money, without being able to fill it, now, when this German danger, which I must bear in smiling silence because I cannot act, threatens the frontier of France?" He clenched his teeth firmly together, a look of anger crossed his face. "This Mexican expedition was a great idea," he then said, "the establishment of the monarchical principle on the other hemisphere opposed to threatening North America; the rule of the Latin races. With the subjugation of the Southern States these plans became impossible; the Emperor Maximilian has not known how to find supporters for his throne; I have no longer any interest in upholding him, and I cannot do it."

"If your majesty had supported the Southern States vigorously?" suggested Piétri, with some diffidence.

"How could I alone?" cried the emperor with animation. "Did not England leave me in the lurch? England, who had a much greater interest than I, in opposing the growth and consolidation of this American Republic? who sheathed the sword that should have cut through those cotton threads, which are threads of life to proud Great Britain. Shall I draw down upon myself alone the hatred and enmity of that nation for the future, without being sure of victory, that I may maintain an emperor upon a throne where he wishes to rule with constitutional theories, joined to wild experimental politics? I am sorry for Maximilian," he continued, taking a few steps about the room; "there is something noble, something great in him; but also much mistiness; he has something of his predecessor, of Joseph II., who came into the world a hundred years too soon, and of that other Maximilian, who was born as much too late, whom the German poet called the last of the knights, forgetting Francis I. I pity him," he said, sighing; "but I cannot help him. After all, it is not so bad after this expedition again to become an archduke of Austria; there are princes who have no such line of retreat if their thrones are wrecked! I wish the Empress Charlotte had gone," he said in a gloomy voice; "she was much excited yesterday--it will be a painful visit!"

He caused the equerry on duty to be summoned, ordered his carriage, and withdrew into his dressing-room.

* * * * *

In a salon, on the *bel étage* of the Grand Hôtel in the Boulevard des Italiens, sat the Empress Charlotte of Mexico, dressed entirely in black. Her face once so lovely, fresh, and charming, was pale and sad; it was already marked with deep lines which gave her the appearance of premature old age, her hair was entirely concealed beneath the black lace handkerchief which came low down on her forehead, her mouth had a restless nervous movement, and her wearied eyes shone at times with an unsteady feverish brilliancy.

Before the empress stood General Almonte, the Mexican ambassador in Paris, a pleasing-looking man of the southern type. He gazed sadly at the princess, who not long before had crossed the sea to ascend the dazzling throne of Montezuma, in fabulous splendour, and who now sat before him broken down by the deepest sorrow; instead of Montezuma's diadem, she had found Guatimozin's crown of martyrdom.

"You do not believe then, general," asked the empress in a trembling voice, "that anything is to be hoped from France?"

"I do not believe it," replied the general gravely; "according to all that I have seen and heard here, the emperor is quite determined to withdraw quickly and definitely from the whole affair. If his majesty the Emperor Maximilian wishes to maintain his throne, (which I ardently desire for the sake of an unhappy country robbed by one adventurer after another)--he must not rely on France--he must find supporters in the country itself. Before all, he must endeavour to win back the firmest and mightiest support, which he has lost--the Church and the clergy; they will procure

him both money and soldiers. Not here," added the general, "is help to be found; if your majesty takes my advice you will go to Rome--the pope alone can restore to the emperor the mighty power of the Mexican clergy--certainly he would require conditions, but quick action is needful, before it is too late," he added in a gloomy voice.

"Oh!" cried the empress, standing up and walking up and down the room with hasty footsteps, "oh! that my noble, unhappy husband should have listened to the enticing words of that fiend, whom men call Napoleon; that he should have forsaken our beautiful Miramar, to hurl himself into this abyss, in which we sink deeper and deeper. If you knew," she cried, with sparkling eyes, as she stood still before the general, "how I entreated him, this man--he went to St.-Cloud, to avoid me," she cried, speaking quicker and with still greater excitement; "I followed him there, I pressed myself upon him, I begged and implored him, I repressed all the anger in my heart, I prayed to him as we pray to God, I threw myself at his feet, I, the grand-daughter of Louis Philippe, threw myself at the feet of the son of that Hortense--oh! my God!"

She sank back exhausted on the sofa.

"And what did the emperor reply?" asked the general, looking with deep compassion at the unhappy lady, whose diadem weighed so heavily upon her brow.

"Nothing," sighed the empress; "phrases of regret, cold words of comfort, which sounded like scorn from his mouth. General," she cried, rising suddenly, and fixing a tragic look upon him, "general, I fear that my reason will give way. So much sorrow no human soul can bear, so many tears no eyes can shed, without falling a prey to the powers of darkness. At night," she cried, gazing into space as if her mind pursued a vision, "at night, if after long tearful watching an uneasy slumber falls upon me, I see him creep up towards me, this demon--this demon brought forth by hell; he holds out a goblet, green flames dart from it! I shudder to my heart's core, but he holds the goblet to my lips, the flames beat on my brow with frightful pain; I must quaff,--quaff the terrible drink he offers me, and this drink is blood!--the blood of my husband!" she cried, shrieking aloud, and stretching out her hands with a movement of convulsive horror.

"Your majesty! for God's sake, calm yourself!" cried the general, dismayed.

A sound was heard in the antechamber.

A lacquey entered.

"His majesty the emperor has just driven into the *porte cochère*," he cried, and threw open the folding door leading to the anteroom.

The Empress Charlotte rose quickly. She passed her handkerchief across her brow, the bewildered look vanished from her features, and she said with a calm and sorrowful smile:

"Leave me alone with him, general, perhaps God has softened his heart."

Napoleon appeared in the antechamber, he wore a black coat with the star and ribbon of the Order of Our Lady of Guadaloupe. Colonel Favé accompanied him.

The empress met him at the threshold of her room.

General Almonte with a deep bow withdrew into the antechamber. The servants closed the door.

Napoleon kissed the hand of the empress, led her to the sofa and placed himself in an arm-chair beside her. The empress looked at him in breathless suspense, his veiled eyes were cast on the ground.

"Is your majesty comfortable here?" he asked in a courteous tone. "I should have been happier if you would have accepted hospitality at one of my palaces."

"I want nothing," said the empress with slight impatience, "I have come to hear my fate. I implore your majesty to say if it is pronounced, and what I have to hope."

"I think I told your majesty yesterday my determination, and the political reasons upon which it was founded," said the emperor in a calm voice. "I can only regret that circumstances forbid, absolutely forbid my compliance with your majesty's wishes, as I should so much have wished," he added, with a polite bow.

The Empress Charlotte's lips trembled convulsively.

"Sire," said she in a repressed voice, "it is not a question of my wishes, they have never been directed to that distant throne. It is a question of the honour, perhaps of the life of my husband, for he will sacrifice his life to his honour."

"But madame," said the emperor, slightly twirling his moustache, "I cannot see how honour can require him madly to bury himself beneath the ruins of a throne that cannot be upheld. Your husband undertook a great and good cause; that it cannot be carried out is the fault, not of himself, but of circumstances,--no one could reproach him."

A bitter smile curved the lips of the empress.

"My husband does not thus regard it," said she, "he will not pass through life as a dethroned prince,--in his opinion a prince who has once ascended a throne should only abandon it with his life."

"The Emperor Maximilian will not drive this opinion, which really does not apply to present circumstances, to extremes," replied Napoleon. "I will send General Castelnau to him, he shall lay before him in my name a full explanation of the circumstances to which I am forced to yield, the emperor will understand them, he will return, and I heartily beg you, madame, to support the general's mission by your persuasions."

A flush passed quickly over the empress's face, her eyes sparkled, her lips quivered, and she said in a hoarse voice:

"The mission will be in vain, and I will never advise my husband to do anything he holds to be at variance with his honour and his noble chivalrous heart."

The emperor slightly bit his lips, his veiled eyes opened for a moment, and a hard, almost an inimical look, flashed upon the empress.

She saw this look, a shudder passed through her, in violent excitement she pressed her hand to her heart, and she said with a deep breath, fixing her burning eyes upon the emperor:

"Sire, it is not a question of my husband's honour alone; to care for this is certainly our own affair, but something else is staked upon this, something that touches your majesty more nearly,--and that is the honour of France."

The emperor gave a cold smile.

"My armies only withdraw from Mexico at my command, and they bring rich laurels with them," he said.

"Laurels?" cried the empress with flashing eyes, "yes, the soldiers who have bravely fought bring laurels with them, and laurels grow on the graves of the fallen, but the banners of France, who now desert the throne raised by France's emperor, the prince who went thither at the call of France, and who is rewarded by humiliation and desertion,--these banners should be veiled in crape, for they have forsaken France's honour! Oh! sire," she exclaimed, restraining herself with a great effort, "I beg you once more--I conjure you--recall your hard decision!"

The emperor's brow wore a gloomy frown, an icy smile was on his lips.

"Madame," he said, "your majesty will allow that I am the best, the only competent judge of what the honour of France demands."

The eyes of the empress flashed, a look of proud contempt appeared on her face.

"Your majesty is the *judge*," she said, "then let me be the *advocate* of the honour of France, my blood gives me this right, the blood of Henri Quatre flows in my veins, and my grandfather was the French king!"

The emperor's long eyelashes were raised, and his angry eyes gazed on the excited woman who sat trembling before him.

He stood up.

The empress also rose.

She pressed both hands upon her heart, her whole form swayed to and fro with the violent effort she made to recover her calmness.

"Sire," she said in a low soft voice, "forgive the wife who pleads for the honour and the life of her husband, if her zeal has made her speak too boldly in a cause which must ever be to her the highest and the holiest on earth. Sire, I implore you for God's sake, for the sake of eternal mercy,--have pity on us, give us your protection one year longer, or give us money, if the blood of France is too precious."

And with an imploring look of indescribable anguish she gazed up at this man, from whose mouth the words of hope could come, which she might bear back to the husband longing for her with such weary anxiety, refreshing his harassed soul with new strength.

Napoleon spoke in a cold voice.

"Madame, the greatest service at this grave moment is perfect truth and openness. I should sin against your majesty, if I allowed you to entertain vain hopes. My decision is as unalterable as the necessity that dictates it. I have nothing more for Mexico--not a man, not a franc!"

The features of the empress grew frightfully distorted, the whites of her eyes grew red as

blood, a flaming brightness glowed in her gaze, her lips receded and showed her gloaming white teeth; with outstretched arms she walked close up to the emperor, and with hissing breath that seemed to drive the words from her breast, she cried in a voice which no longer sounded human:

"Yes! it is true, the image of my dream, the horrible apparition of my sleep! there he stands with his goblet of blood!--demon of hell!--executioner of my family!--murderer of my husband!--laughing devil!--murder me, the grand-daughter of Louis Philippe,--of that king who rescued you from misery, and saved you from the scaffold."

As if before some supernatural appearance the emperor slowly stepped backwards to the door. The empress stood still, and stretching out her hand towards him she cried, whilst her features grew more frightfully convulsed, and her eyes glowed more wildly:

"Hence, fiend! but take with thee my curse. The curse which God hurled at the head of the first murderer shall destroy thy throne! flames shall blot out thy house! and when thou liest in the dust from whence thou hast risen, expiring in shame and weakness, the avenging angel shall shake the depths of thy despairing soul with the cry of 'Charlotte and Maximilian!'"

Seized with horror the emperor turned round, covering his eyes with his hands. He hurried to the door, and rushed into the anteroom, where he found his equerry, and General Almonte much shocked at the dreadful sound of the empress's voice. He cried scarcely audibly--"Come, Favé, come quickly, the empress is ill."

He hurried down the steps, looking anxiously back; the equerry rushed after him.

General Almonte hastened back into the empress's room.

The unhappy princess had sunk on her knees in the middle of the salon, her left hand was pressed to her heart, her right stretched upwards, and with upturned eyes she stared vacantly at the ceiling--a statue of despair.

The general hastened to her.

"For God's sake," he cried, bending over her, "I conjure your majesty, calm, collect yourself! What has happened?"

A slight shiver passed through her limbs, she slowly turned her eyes towards the general, she looked at him with surprise, passed her hand over her brow, and allowed him to raise her, and lead her to the sofa. A lady in waiting had entered in great anxiety, and assisted the general, the lacquey stood with a frightened face at the door of the ante-room.

Suddenly the empress rose, her eyes wandered round the room. "Where is he?" she cried in a hoarse voice, "he has gone, he must not go. I will dog his heels, day and night my shrieks for revenge shall pierce his ears!"

"Your majesty!" cried the general.

"Away!" screamed the empress, "leave me: my carriage, my carriage; after him, the traitor, my husband's murderer!"

And she tore herself free from the general, and the lady in attendance, rushed through the anteroom and down the stairs, still crying, "My carriage! my carriage!"

The general hastened after her. The servant followed.

In the large court of the Grand Hôtel there was a concourse of inquisitive people, attracted by the arrival of the imperial carriage. On the large balcony sat foreigners reading newspapers and chatting.

Suddenly they heard the loud out-cry of a woman clad in black, with distorted features and blood-shot starting eyes. She appeared at the foot of the large staircase, and shrieked incessantly: "My carriage, my carriage!"

General Almonte overtook the empress. He sought to calm her, it was impossible. All eyes were fixed on the surprising apparition.

The general in great distress wishing to bring the dreadful scene to an end, desired the lacquey who was in the empress's service, to bring a carriage into the court of the hotel.

The equipage drove round.

With one spring the empress threw herself in. The general seized the door to follow her. Then her strength failed her--she collapsed, her eyes closed, white foam appeared on her lips; unconscious, with convulsive shudders, she fell back on the cushions.

Several servants hastily appeared. They carried her gently upstairs to her own room.

"What a tragedy begins," said General Almonte, shuddering, as he followed slowly; "and what

a conclusion lies in the lap of the future!"

* * * * *

Late in the afternoon, the brilliant carriages belonging to the aristocracy, the *haute finance*, and the foreign diplomacy, drove slowly round the Bois de Boulogne. The whole Paris world had remained in town, the universal interest in the European crisis chained them to the capital; and the whole world took its accustomed slow drive before dinner, along the beautiful shores of the two lakes, in the charming, wonderfully-kept Bois de Boulogne. Between the imposing heavy-looking carriages with their powdered servants, drove the carriages belonging to the 'demi-monde,' light and graceful, with spirited prancing steeds; and the young gentlemen, without regarding the displeased looks of the ladies of the 'grande monde,' rode close to these carriages, laughingly and jestingly replying to the piquant remarks made by the ladies of the avant-scène and the Café anglais.

In an open caleche drawn by four beautiful brown horses, preceded by two piqueurs in green and gold, with an officer riding near the door, drove the emperor amongst the lively varied throng. Beside him sat General Fleury. Napoleon's face beamed with good humour, he conversed with animation to the general, responding with gracious empressement, right and left, to the salutes he received, whilst the brilliant equipage drove slowly three times round the lake. An hour later all Paris knew that the emperor was in excellent health, and that affairs must be going on well, since his majesty showed such remarkable cheerfulness.

The emperor was in the same good spirits at the dinner to which the marshals and several distinguished officers were invited. The *cercle* was over, the sun had set, and the warm darkness of evening was spread over the gigantic city.

The emperor entered his cabinet. He laid aside the uniform he had worn at dinner, and put on a plain black frock coat.

As soon as his valet had gone he called Piétri.

"Is my carriage without livery ready?" he asked.

"It is waiting at the side door as your majesty commanded."

"You have told me of that remarkable pupil of Lenormand," said the emperor. "Morny, too, has spoken to me of her, Madame Moreau, is she not?"

Piétri smiled.

"She has really foretold things in a wonderful way; I once visited her myself, and I was much struck by her prophecies."

"And were they fulfilled?" asked the emperor.

"Much, sire, that she foretold happened."

"I will hear her," said Napoleon; "come with me."

And he went down the staircase leading to his room; followed by his secretary.

They walked along a corridor, and passed through a side door into an inner court of the Tuileries; here stood a plain carriage with two black horses, a coachman, not in livery, sat on the box; it looked like a doctor's carriage.

The emperor stepped in.

Piétri followed him and cried to the coachman, "5, Rue Tournon."

The carriage started at a brisk trot, and drove down the Rue de Rivoli.

A second carriage, equally unremarkable, followed at a little distance.

It contained the chief of the palace police, and one of his officers.

In the old part of Paris, near the palace of the Luxembourg, is the Rue Tournon, one of those ancient streets bearing the stamp of past times, with low houses, old sashes, and small windows. The emperor's carriage stopped before No. 5; Piétri went first through a large open doorway leading into a small *porte-cochère*. The emperor followed him. The second carriage stopped at the corner of the street, its occupants got out, and began smoking and chatting as they slowly paced the trottoir.

Napoleon followed his secretary through the *porte-cochère*, and at the end of it walked up some high dark steps leading to a door. A small landing at the top of the first flight was lighted by a plain but elegant lamp, and a white china door-plate bore the name of Madame Moreau.

"It is the same house and the same apartment that Lenormand occupied," said Piétri, as he rang the bell near the door-plate.

The emperor looked round with great interest.

"Here then came Napoleon the First," said he, thoughtfully, "and here the crown was prophesied which he afterwards obtained."

The door opened. A young woman dressed like a Parisian housemaid appeared. The emperor pulled up the collar of his coat, and held his handkerchief before the lower part of his face.

Piétri stepped forwards and concealed him.

"Madame Moreau?" he asked.

"I do not know whether madame still receives," replied the girl; "it is very late."

"We are friends," said Piétri. "Madame will admit us."

"Walk into the salon, gentlemen; I will announce you."

She led the emperor and his secretary to a small, but richly and elegantly furnished room. Thick carpets covered the floor, large fauteuils stood around a table, on which lay several illustrated journals, a large lamp hung from the ceiling, and brightly lighted up the room.

"Your majesty must learn to wait in the ante-room," said Piétri, jestingly, as he wheeled a chair towards Napoleon.

He only placed his hand lightly on the back, and looked round the room with great interest. On the wall hung a large engraving, his own likeness in his coronation robes. With a slight sigh the emperor glanced at the slender, youthful figure represented; then he said, pointing it out laughingly to Piétri:

"This lady appears well disposed."

"She is a scholar of Lenormand, sire," replied Piétri, "and holds to the traditions of her mistress; also she was an especial favourite of the Duke de Morny."

A small door concealed by a very thick dark *portière* opened, the curtain was pushed aside, and a short, rather stout lady in a plain black dress appeared in the doorway. She was about fifty years of age, with dark smooth hair and lively black eyes, so keen and piercing, that they were an almost startling contrast to the somewhat puffy and very commonplace face to which they belonged.

Piétri advanced.

"I thank you, madame," he said, "for receiving us at this late hour. You have already given me such brilliant proofs of your art, that I have brought a friend who is travelling through Paris, and who begs you to unveil his future."

"Walk this way, messieurs," said Madame Moreau quietly, in an agreeable voice and with the manner of a lady of good society.

And she returned to her cabinet. Piétri and the emperor followed her.

This cabinet was a small square room, which had besides the door leading into the salon, a second door, through which visitors could depart who did not care to face those who might be waiting in the other apartment. This cabinet had a dark carpet. The window looking towards the courtyard was concealed by ample thick green curtains. A tall old chest stood against the wall, near to the window was a somewhat small table covered with a green cloth, and before it a large chair in which the prophetess generally sat. Upon the table stood a lamp with a dark green shade, which lighted up the surface of the table, and left the rest of the room in deep shadow. Upon the other side of the table stood a few dark green chairs and a small divan of the same colour.

The emperor seated himself in an arm-chair in the shadow, and put his handkerchief to his face.

Madame Moreau took no notice. She was accustomed to guests who desired to preserve a strict incognito.

She took her place at the table and asked, "Do you wish the *grand jeu?*"

"Certainly," replied Piétri, who stood close to Napoleon's chair.

"Will monsieur then show me his hand? The left if he pleases."

Napoleon rose and walked to the table, so that the shadow of the dark lamp shade fell on his face, and he held out his hand to the soothsayer; long, slender, and soft it looked much younger

than his face or figure.

Madame Moreau seized this hand, turned the palm upwards, and opened the line between the thumb and forefinger to its utmost extent.

"What a tenacious, enduring will," she said, without raising her eyes from the emperor's hand; "yet there is a weakness here, a hesitating delay; this hand is formed to draw the bow with care and skill, but it will hesitate before letting the arrow fly; it wishes to remain lord of the arrow in its flight, but the arrow then belongs to fate. This hand will not quickly loose the string even when the aim is taken, and the eye perceives that the right moment has come; it will launch the arrow from the concussion of a sudden doubt,--but the arrow obeys the eternal might of Providence," she added, in a low voice. She then continued her attentive examination of the palm. "Broken soon after its beginning, the line of life winds in entwining curves, often crossed and stopped by opposing lines, then it rises in a bold, broad arch, higher and higher, until--"

She gazed with a vacant, dreamy look upon the hand, and remained silent.

"You have a remarkable hand, monsieur," she said, without looking up; "the great Fabius Cunctator must have had a hand like yours--yet here are lines which must have been found in the hand of Catiline, though without the restless haste of that conspirator, and here are the lines of Cæsar--no, of Augustus. Sir," she said, "your hand is very remarkable, it is formed slowly and carefully to knot the threads of fate, it is made to build up and to collect, to uphold and to foster, and yet fate often compels it to destroy."

"And whither does the line of life lead?" asked the emperor, in so low a voice that the sound was scarcely heard.

Madame Moreau said slowly and thoughtfully:

"It turns back to whence it came."

Napoleon looked at Piétri.

"Uncertain as the Pythia," he whispered.

Madame Moreau might have heard and understood these words or not. She said:

"The riddle which the line of life does not reveal, will perhaps be read by my cards."

She let go the emperor's hand, and taking from a drawer in her table some large cards, beautifully painted with strange figures and characters, she handed them to the emperor to shuffle.

He did so, still keeping his face in the shadow from the lamp, and gave her back the pack.

"Monsieur," she then said, "this is a combination that seldom occurs. I see you surrounded by the brightest splendour of the highest on earth, your hand links the fate of numbers. My God!" she cried, "for One only have I seen this constellation--it is so, it must be so, here is the eagle above your head; the star in the diagonal, the golden bees,--it would be unworthy to remain silent, it would lower my art."

She rose hastily and bowing deeply, with a movement possessing a certain grace and dignity, notwithstanding her short and corpulent figure, she said:

"My poor house has the happiness of beholding the monarch of France beneath its roof; sire, with the deepest respect I greet my great and beloved emperor!"

Napoleon started with surprise, then he moved out of the shadow and said laughingly:

"I must compliment you, madame, on the penetration of your cards. Since my great uncle visited your mistress, his nephew and successor may well visit the pupil. But now that we are without mask," he continued, "tell me more of the fate inscribed on your cards."

Madame Moreau returned to her chair, and seated herself at a sign from the emperor--who on his part came close to the table and sat down, looking at the out-spread cards attentively.

"Sire," said the lady, "your majesty will believe that I, who love France, and whose whole heart hangs upon your great race, have often tried in solitude to read by my art the fate of the empire; wonderful to say, this very constellation has each time appeared, the very same which now lies unchanged before me, in the cards your imperial hand has shuffled. I cannot be deceived. It would be absurd of me to tell of your majesty's past, from the cards now lying before me; one thing only I would say,"--she added with hesitation, "may I speak?" and she glanced at Piétri.

"I have no secrets from this gentleman," said Napoleon.

"Sire," proceeded Madame Moreau, still gazing on the cards, "your majesty is happy in a noble consort possessing every virtue--and yet--"

"And yet?" asked the emperor in a voice in which surprise mingled with slight impatience.

"Sire," said she slowly and solemnly, "the life of your majesty lies on the border land of the powers of light and darkness, a bright and glittering star beams down upon it, but the deep shadow of a demon-like fate often threatens to obscure its pure light. Beneath the brilliance of that star, beneath the influence of its blessed rays, the young heart of your majesty first opened to the warm breath of youthful poetry, and an absorbing love: the great emperor's blessing, the noble martyr of St. Helena, rested on this love; it would have lighted and warmed your majesty's heart; and this love was responded to by a heart in whose veins flowed the blood of your great predecessor."

The emperor looked down with emotion, a melancholy expression appeared on his face.

"Sire," continued Madame Moreau, "the dark shadow prevailed, the night of fate closed over that love and its hopes. The heart that beat for you has grieved during a sad and solitary life, and you have missed the guide, the good genius of your youth, who would have led you onwards beneath the rays of your star, and who would often have strengthened your doubting heart."

The emperor was silent. A sigh heaved his breast.

"Go on," he then said.

"Even now, sire," said Madame Moreau, "your heart is in doubt, to-day two opposing spirits wrestle in your soul, you balance between war and peace,--oh! wonderful," she proceeded, gazing attentively at the cards and pointing to some of the pictures, "the men of the sword urge peace."

The emperor listened with surprise.

"Sire," she said, "you have broken the pride of Russia, you have led England's queen to the grave of your uncle, you have revenged upon the house of Hapsburg the humiliations of the King of Rome. Sire, your star's bright beams have lighted you brilliantly on your course; beware of Germany," she said in a hoarse tone, "there the demon-like shadow of your evil fate prevails. Beware! beware!" she cried vehemently, lifting up her hands as if to conjure him, "pause, before you throw the iron dice of war!"

The emperor gazed before him. A slight shudder passed through his limbs.

"And you will pause," continued she, perusing the pictures on her cards, and drawing long lines over the out-spread pack, "for I see you surrounded by the smiling images of peace, and only in the back-ground the god of war zealously whets his sword for future days."

"And shall France thus humble herself?" said Napoleon in a low voice, as if expressing his thoughts aloud, "shall she yield, draw back!"

"I see no humiliation," said Madame Moreau, with sparkling eyes gazing at the cards; "I see dazzling splendour, brighter even than that which surrounded your uncle's throne, I see all the nations of the world assembled around the steps of your imperial throne, I see emperors and kings, all the princes of Europe,--almost of the earth,--surrounding you in a brilliant circle; the Sultan greets the imperial lord of France, the successor of Peter the Great, ah! what is this!" she cried. "Sire, watch, watch over the duty sacred to a guest, murder lurks for Alexander on the soil of France, yet God averts the blow. I see new splendour, brilliant splendour and proud joy, all the people of Europe, Asia, and America, even the swarthy Nubians of Africa, uniting in astonished admiration at the glory of imperial France."

The emperor's eyes were fully opened, they flashed with pride.

"And then?" he asked.

"Sire," said Madame Moreau, "your conquering star has reached the zenith, then clouds arise, bloody lightning flashes through them, I see the points of lances sparkle, I see the war-god in tempestuous thunder stride over the earth, I see your majesty at the head of a moving army, I see you in Germany,"--she covered her eyes with her hands. "Ah! that is far away!" she said slowly; "my eyes are dazzled, I have not powers like the great Lenormand to see into the distant future, later on it will be clear, but to enduring peace fate has not destined you sire, see here!" And in prophetic tones she said: "If the olive tree overshadows France, her laurels must fade!"

The emperor looked at her thoughtfully.

"For the present, then, peace will bring me happiness and glory, but I must not let the olive trees overpower the laurels?"

She slightly nodded her head, still gazing at the cards. Her face quivered, she opened her lips as if to speak, but she was silent.

Napoleon stood up. Once more his eyes looked searchingly round the room.

"In this room, then, Madame Lenormand entertained the emperor?" he asked.

"In this very room, sire," said Madame Moreau, rising, "only the arrangement of the furniture has been slightly changed."

"I thank you, madame," said Napoleon, "follow my horoscope, I shall be glad to hear more from you!"

And with a friendly smile, he walked to the door, which Madame Moreau opened for him, the lamp in her hand.

On the stairs he took Piétri's arm and said:

"Stay, madame, I do not wish to be recognized. I rely on your discretion. Adieu!"

The quiet-looking carriage drove quickly back to the Tuileries.

When he re-entered his cabinet, the emperor seated himself at his writing-table. Piétri stood beside him:

Napoleon wrote:

"My dear Monsieur Drouyn de Lhuys,--

"I herewith send you an explanation of the reasons which, according to my unalterable decision, render a moderate policy necessary on the part of France, with regard to recent events in Germany. I do not doubt that you will entirely share my views, and I beg you to believe in my sincere friendship."

And he signed it, "Napoleon."

He handed the paper silently to Piétri.

"Sire," he said, after reading it, "who does your majesty destine to be the successor of Monsieur Drouyn de Lhuys?"

"Moustiers knows the state of affairs in Berlin well," said the emperor; "prepare a letter to him beforehand, to inquire if he will undertake the guidance of foreign affairs."

Piétri bowed.

"One thing more," said Napoleon, "let Hansen come to me early to-morrow morning, we will make *one* more effort."

"At your majesty's command."

"What do you think of Madame Moreau?" asked the emperor, who had already turned towards the door leading to his private apartments, as he paused for a moment. "How could she know that episode of my youth?" he whispered in a low voice.

"Sire," replied Piétri, "it is difficult to say."

"'There are more things in heaven and earth than are dreamt of in our philosophy,'" said Napoleon in perfect English; and with a friendly nod he dismissed his secretary.

CHAPTER XXV.

THE SICK AND WOUNDED.

In a somewhat large salon adjoining the bedroom of his comfortable bachelor apartments, in one of the old-fashioned houses of a quiet part of the town, Lieutenant von Stielow, the morning after his return, lay upon a large sofa covered with dark red silk.

Half-closed curtains of the same colour hung before the window, admitting a subdued light into the room, where complete quiet prevailed, only broken from time to time by a carriage belonging to one of the aristocracy rolling swiftly past.

The young man wore a wide morning wrapping coat of black silk, with scarlet collar and facings; beside him stood a small table with a beautiful silver tea service; he slowly smoked a short chibouk, from which the fragrant clouds of Turkish tobacco floated about the room, and his features expressed perfect happiness and calm content. After the long privations and fatigues of camp life, the young officer for the first time enjoyed the quiet and rich comfort around him, and

with happy looks he greeted everything; the numerous objects which his room contained, the paintings, the engravings, the curious arms, the bits of old Dresden china, in short all the thousand things which the good taste or passing fancy of a wealthy and cultivated young man collects in his rooms.

All this, which he had formerly been so accustomed to that he scarcely deemed it worthy of a glance, now smiled upon him with the charm of novelty; for so long his eyes had only seen pictures of privation, of horror, and of death, that the surroundings of his previous life met him with a greeting full of charm; then he thought of his love, of the dangers which had surrounded him upon the battle-fields, of the frightful peril which had threatened his young pure love from wicked machinations, of his happy preservation amidst the bullets and swords of the enemy, of the good fortune that had brought him back at the right moment to destroy those machinations, finally, of the hopes which were now his own without an obstacle. No wonder that his eyes beamed, that his lips smiled, and that the world looked as fair, as bright, and as charming as it only can appear to a young heart who sees itself possessed of everything that can make life one sweet enjoyment.

He had promised the Countess Frankenstein to take no step against the person who had made the low attempt on her daughter and himself. "Let us never again speak of those creatures, or remember anything of the affair, except to thank God who brought their wickedness to shame," said Clara, with a gentle smile; and so great is the elasticity of a heart of one-and-twenty, so great the conciliatory power of happiness, that he scarcely remembered the circumstance which had threatened the holiest feelings of his heart, except from the sweet feeling of higher enjoyment which lies in the full possession of that which you feared to lose.

The door opened quickly and a servant entered with a disturbed and frightened face.

"My lord baron," he said with some hesitation, "I must--"

The young officer turned his head and looked at him inquiringly; but he could not finish his sentence, for a slender female form in a light morning dress hastily advanced through the half-open door, and with a quick and decided movement pushed the servant aside. Her face was concealed by a thick veil hanging from her small round hat.

Herr von Stielow rose and walked towards his visitor with an expression of great surprise, whilst he dismissed the servant by a sign, and he, by shrugging his shoulders endeavoured to signify that he had not been able to announce this visitor to his master in the usual way.

Scarcely had the door closed than the lady threw back her veil. Herr von Stielow beheld the beautiful features of Madame Balzer. She was pale, but her cheeks were tinged with a light rosy hue, her large eyes glowed with deep passionate fire, upon her slightly parted lips lay an expression of bashful shame, mingled with a look of firm and energetic decision. She was wonderfully beautiful, more charming in this plain, almost grisette-like toilette, than in the rich and recherché elegance which usually surrounded her.

The young man looked at the well-known face before him with blank amazement, almost with fear; for it was the last thing he expected to see.

"Antonia!" he exclaimed in a low voice.

"Your lips, then, have not forgotten that name," she said, fixing her sorrowful eyes upon him; "I feared that all, all remembrance, had vanished from your heart, even the name of her whom once you loved, and whom you now despise,--condemn unheard."

Stielow was so amazed, so discomposed by this visit, that he still stood opposite to her without uttering a word: a flash of anger, of defiance had shone in his eyes, but it had disappeared--how could anger be maintained against this gentle humility, this look so full of entreaty and of sorrow? He gazed at her vacantly, contradictory feelings struggling in his breast.

"You have condemned me," she continued in that soft melting voice, only bestowed upon a few women, and which touches the heart of the listener like a caress, "you have turned from me without asking a word of explanation, and yet you loved me once, and yet," she whispered hesitatingly, as she cast down her eyes, and a rosy blush passed over her face, "yet, you must have known that I loved you!"

Herr von Stielow still found not a word to oppose to these looks, this language; he almost felt he was really hard and cruel, and it needed the full recollection of the evening before, to enable him to maintain calm composure before this woman.

Antonia came one step nearer, and fixed her eyes upon him, with a melancholy expression of unutterable tenderness. "My love," she said in her soft voice, "was as pure, as confiding as a young maiden's, yet fiery and glowing as the wine of the south, and it filled my whole soul, it had enchained my pride. I lay at your feet, as a slave at the feet of her lord!"

Tears glittered in her lovely eyes.

"I beg you--" said von Stielow, feeling quite distracted. "Why these declarations about the past,

now? Why this painful scene?"

"You are right," she replied, and a proud flash shone in her eyes without dispersing the melancholy that veiled them, "you are right. I ought not to touch upon that past, but there is a nearer past of which I must speak, which leads me hither."

"But--" said von Stielow.

Without heeding him she continued:

"Before you, I had no longer pride, no longer a will, it is true; but you coldly and cruelly forsook me"--she placed her hand upon her heart, and pressed her lips together. "You humiliated me, and my pride again arose. I wished to hate you, to forget you," she added in a hoarse voice: "but all the nobler feelings of my heart rebelled against it. I could not do it," she said in trembling tones; "and my pride said, 'Though he no longer loves, he shall not despise!'"

Herr von Stielow's face had grown calm. He looked at her coldly, a scarcely perceptible smile upon his lips.

"You had a right," she added, "it is true, to think me false, and to believe yourself the toy of a coquettish whim, perhaps even worse; you shall believe it no more, the memory of me shall not be mingled with contempt."

"Let us leave the past," said he; "I assure you--"

"No," she cried vehemently, "you shall hear me,--if the past gives me no other right, it gives me this, to demand a hearing!"

He was silent.

"You know," she proceeded, "what my life was; with a heart full of love, with a spirit that craved and strove for higher things, I was in early life fettered to the husband with whom you are acquainted. He himself encouraged a crowd of young men around me. Count Rivero came near me, I found in him the richest genius,--the satisfying of all my wishes, I believed I loved him," she added, casting down her eyes, "at least he brought light and interest to my life. Is that a crime?"

Without waiting for an answer she went on passionately:--

"Then I learned to know you, I discovered my mistake, my heart told me that before only my mind had been satisfied. I now felt how this new feeling had taken deep root in my inmost life. Let me be silent about that time," she said with quivering lips, "recollections that I cannot stifle would unnerve me. I struggled long and severely," she continued in a calm voice, as if subduing her emotion by a mighty effort; "ought I to have spoken to you of the past? I did not dare, my love made me cowardly; I feared to lose you. I feared to see a cloud upon the brow I loved. I was silent; I was silent because I feared. Rivero was away. I ought to have broken with him. Oh!" she cried in a voice of pain, whilst her whole form trembled, "you know the humiliating position in which I was placed; the man whose name I bear, my husband, was under heavy obligations to him; under the circumstances I could not venture suddenly and quickly to cease our correspondence. I awaited his return. I knew him to be noble and generous. I wished to tell him all, to explain,--then there was that unhappy meeting, the intercourse which I wished quietly and prudently to drop, was torn asunder--oh! what I have suffered!"

Herr von Stielow was moved, and looked at her with compassion.

"If I have erred," she proceeded, "I am still not so guilty as I seem, my heart has never sinned against the truth of my love. I swear to you, since the day I said, 'I love you'"--she pronounced the words with a strange melting charm--"every throb of my heart, every feeling of my soul has been yours; my first conversation with the count was an explanation with regard to you."

She stepped nearer to him, she lifted her folded hands and gazed up at him with a look of inexpressible love, and said:

"I have not betrayed my love. I have not forgotten it. I cannot forget it. I have come because I must make this explanation, because I cannot bear"--and here her voice seemed choked with tears--"that you should despise me, that you should quite forget me," she added lower still, "I cannot believe, that all, all has vanished from your heart. I cannot part from you without telling you that if ever your heart should feel lonely you have a friend who never, never can deny her first love."

She looked unspeakably lovely as she stood there before him, so humble, so gentle, her lips slightly parted, her eyes, though suffused with tears, still glowing with a tender fire, her figure languidly bent forward.

The young man looked at her with great compassion, the sound of her voice, the magnetic brightness of her eyes, had aroused within him memories of the past. But the mild gentle expression vanished from his face, his eyes flashed and a scornful smile appeared on his lips.

"Let us leave the past," he said coldly and politely. "I have not reproached you, and I will not

reproach you, I wish you----"

She looked at him sorrowfully.

"Then my words have been in vain," she said, sadly, "you do not believe me----"

An angry flash passed over his face.

"I believe you," he said, "and I do not want your words, for thank God! I know everything. I think this conversation upon the earlier past will come to an end when I give you a proof that I am acquainted with your last proceeding."

And with a quick angry movement he turned to a casket standing upon a console table before a mirror, opened it and held towards her the letter she had sent by her husband to the Countess Frankenstein.

"You see," he said, "I know the way in which you use the souvenirs of the past against the present."

She shrank back, as if struck by lightning. The paleness of death overspread her face--her features were convulsed, her eyes fixed immovably upon the paper.

"I think this will bring our conversation to an end," he said, with a bitter smile.

A deep crimson flush spread over her face, her limbs trembled, burning passion shone in her eyes.

"No," she cried in a wild voice, "no, it is not at an end--it shall not be at an end!"

Herr von Stielow slightly shrugged his shoulders.

"It shall not be at an end," she cried in trembling excitement, "because I love you, because I cannot leave you, because you cannot be happy with that woman, to whom you will give your name, but whose cold heart will never feel for you the fiery glow that streams through mine."

"Madam, you go too far," said Stielow, and an expression of repugnance and contempt appeared upon his face.

"You deceive yourself," she said, whilst her lips burned a rich carmine and her feverish eyes lighted up her pale face. "I know how warmly your heart has beaten for me, it cannot be happy in a conventional love, in lukewarm kisses meted out by custom."

He half turned from her.

"You go too far," he said again.

"Hear me, my own, my love," and she sank down at his feet stretching out her arms towards him; "hear me, and do not despise me, I cannot live without you. Give your hand," she cried in a voice full of passion, "to that woman, give her your name, but leave me your heart: the time will come when you will long for happiness, then come back to me, to dream, to love; I ask for nothing,--nothing, I will wait humbly, I will live upon the remembrance of the quiet happiness of the past during the long days when I do not see you,--do all that you will,--only love me."

She seized his hand and pressed it to her glowing lips, then her head fell back a little, her half-closed eyes looked at him imploringly, the warm breath from her mouth seemed to surround him with an enchanted atmosphere of love and passion.

A slight shudder passed through him; he closed his eyes for a moment.

Then he looked at her with calm friendship, and holding her hand firmly he gently raised her.

"Antonia," he said quietly, "I should be unworthy to wear a sword if I gave you any answer but this; let everything be forgotten and forgiven that belongs to the past, no other remembrance will abide with me but that of friendship, and if you need a friend, you will find one in me."

And he let go her hand after pressing it gently.

Was it the tone of his voice, was it the quiet pressure of his hand, that convinced her quick womanly perceptions that she had lost his love for ever? She stood motionless, the passionate tears left her eyes, a flash of hatred gleamed in her look, but she hastily concealed it beneath her downcast eyelids.

With a quiet movement she drew down her veil, and said in a voice that retained no traces of its former emotion:

"Farewell; may you be happy!"

She turned to the door.

Stielow accompanied her silently and gravely through the ante-room to the outer door of his apartments, which a servant hurried forwards to open.

She went out with hasty footsteps.

The young man returned and sank into an arm-chair as if exhausted.

"Was it real, or was it acting?" he whispered thoughtfully.

"No matter," he cried after a short consideration, "it does not become me to judge her--may she find happiness!"

And quickly springing up he said, whilst his face cleared up:

"This was the last cloud that threatened to veil my star."

He rang for his servant, made a hasty toilette, and drove in his cab to the house of the Countess Frankenstein.

In the afternoon the most varied life filled the wide alleys of the Prater. Upon the broad turf beneath the trees of this enormous park some of the cavalry regiments recalled to Vienna were still encamped, and the different scenes of camp life were picturesquely displayed. There stood the horses picketed, as if on actual service, neighing and whinnying with impatience, here lay a circle of soldiers around a smouldering fire, on which, in the field kettle, their meal was cooking; booths were erected in which food and drink, the Vienna sausage, and camp beer, were offered for sale; and the Viennese streamed in and out in countless numbers. Now that the real war was over with its fears and anguish, they liked to gaze here on the last picture of it, which only offered to the eye its romantic charm, and not its dreadful earnest. But the groups of lookers-on were the thickest around an open space girt in by tall trees, where the brown sons of Hungary were displaying their fantastic national dance--the Czardas. A man played, upon an old violin, one of those peculiar melodies, half wailing, half wild dithyrambic movements, which even when thus executed sounds upon the ear with a strange mysterious charm; the others pursued a peculiar dance, with its strange pantomimic evolutions, sometimes jingling their spurs together, sometimes stamping on the ground with their feet, sometimes twisting the body into strange but always graceful attitudes.

Amongst one of these groups stood old Grois, the comic actor Knaak, and the ever-merry Josephine Gallmeyer.

"Pepi's" beautiful eyes sparkling with fun and mirth attentively followed all the movements of the Czardas. She slightly nodded her head, and beat time with her hand, to the sharply accentuated music.

"Look, old Grois," she then said, turning to her companion, who watched the moving picture with sad and doleful eyes, "those are capital fellows; I should like to choose a sweetheart from amongst them, they please me better than all our *fade* cavaliers put together."

"Yes," said the old actor gloomily, "there they dance, and when it came to fighting for Austria they let them stay behind, eighty regiments of our glorious cavalry have never been in action; it almost breaks one's heart to think of it all."

"Fie! old blood-thirsty tiger," cried the Gallmeyer; "let us be glad they are still left to dance, and that they have not been under those cursed needle-guns--there would not have been many of them left!"

"Bah! needle-guns!" cried old Grois. "Now it is to be the needle-guns that have done everything; at first everyone said it was the generals' fault, and now the generals say it was the needle-guns. I hold to it they were right at first, and that if the Prussians had had our generals, their needle-guns would not have helped them much."

"Happy is he who forgets what cannot be mended," cried Fräulein Gallmeyer; "nothing can be done against the Prussians, they surpass the gods!"

"Why this sudden admiration for the Prussians?" asked Knaak.

"Well, you know," said the Gallmeyer, "it is true they do surpass the gods, for one of our poets who has written such lovely rôles for my friend the Wolter says," and here she placed herself in a comically pathetic attitude, and imitating exactly the voice and manner of the great actress of the Burg Theatre, repeated: "'Against folly even the gods strive in vain!' Well, the Prussians have not striven against folly in vain!" she cried, laughing.

"Pepi," said old Grois in a grave voice, "you can say what you please about me, and the rest of the world; but if you make the misfortunes of my dear Austria the subject of your wit, we shall quarrel!"

"That would be frightful!" cried the Gallmeyer, "for I should then in the end be forced"--and she looked at him with a roguish smile.

"Well, what?" he asked, already pacified.

"To strive in vain with old Grois," she cried, and let just the tip of her tongue appear between her fresh lips, whilst she twirled round on the point of her toe.

"And did I speak sensibly to such a creature?" cried the old actor, half displeased, half laughing.

The Czardas was at an end, and the different groups moved on.

"See," said Knaak, "there is our friend Stielow and his beautiful fiancée."

And he pointed out an elegant open carriage which drove slowly along the broad alley. Countess Frankenstein and her daughter sat facing the horses, Lieutenant von Stielow in his rich Uhlan uniform opposite to them. His face beamed with happiness as he talked to the young countess, and pointed out to her the different encampments in the park.

"A handsome pair," said old Grois benevolently, as he looked at the two smiling young creatures.

"Oh! that it may remain green for ever! the lovely period of youthful love!" exclaimed the Gallmeyer. "That is what my friend Wolter would say," she added laughingly; "but I am very angry with him, for I made him a declaration of love, and he despised me; but I shall console myself!"

They passed on.

The countess's carriage, when it had left the thick throng of pedestrians behind it, drove rapidly towards the town.

At that time long trains, filled with sick and wounded, arrived daily at the northern station; they were brought from the bandaging sheds and field hospitals, to Vienna and other places more in the interior, that they might receive more regular nursing.

The rooms belonging to the station were fitted up for the reception of the wounded; many arrived in so weak a condition that they could not be moved immediately, nearly all required to rest for a time, and the further transport had to be arranged.

It was the regular custom of the ladies of Vienna in every grade, from the highest aristocracy to the simple shopkeeper's wife, to go to the railway station when such a train arrived, to refresh the wounded with cooling drinks and light nourishment, to have linen and lint ready, and to assist the surgeons as far as they could in any needful operation, or fresh bandaging. Here was richly shown that beautiful, truly patriotic spirit of self-denial, so abundant in the Austrian people, that spirit which the imperial government so frequently misunderstood, so frequently repressed; but which it scarcely ever directed aright in its lively desire to benefit the whole nation.

"Some wounded soldiers are coming in," said the young Countess Frankenstein to her mother, as the carriage arrived at the end of the Prater, and drew near the northern railway station; "shall we not go? I have brought some bandages, some raspberry vinegar, and some wine. I want," she said, turning to her lover with a charming smile, "to help all the poor wounded soldiers that I can, to show my gratitude to God for helping me so graciously in my own trouble and sorrow."

Stielow affectionately pressed her hand and looked with admiration at her lovely, blushing face.

"I thank you for recollecting it," said the countess; "we can never do enough for those who fight and suffer for their country, and we ought to set an example to the classes beneath us."

"I must beg you to excuse me," said von Stielow, looking at his watch, "I must wait on General Gablenz and hear if he has any commands for me."

Clara looked disappointed.

"But in the evening you will be free?" she asked.

"I certainly hope so," said the young man, "for there is now little for the aides-de-camp to do."

The carriage had reached the railway station. At a sign from the lieutenant it drew up at the entrance.

"We shall meet again then," said Countess Frankenstein to Herr von Stielow, who took leave of the ladies, and Clara's looks said plainer than words: "We shall soon meet again."

The footman sprang from the box, opened the carriage-door, took a basket from the boot, and followed the ladies into the interior of the station.

It presented a touching, grave, and melancholy picture; but at the same time much that was

pleasing and affecting.

Field-beds and litters stood close together in long rows, on which lay wounded, sick, and dying soldiers belonging to every branch of the service, Prussian as well as Austrian. Some bore their sufferings in mute resignation, others sighed and groaned from the horrible tortures that they endured.

The surgeons walked amongst them, examining into the condition of the new arrivals, giving orders where they were to be taken, according to the nature of their wounds, and the hopes they entertained of their recovery. The bandages were renewed before further transport, medicine and refreshment were administered, and operations immediately needful were performed in cabinets erected for the purpose and prepared beforehand. All this was sad and distressing; those who had seen the proud regiments set out, the eyes of the soldiers flashing at the blast of the trumpet, and who now saw the broken suffering forms brought back from the battle-field, where the sacrifice of their blood had not obtained victory for the banners of their country, might indeed sigh sorrowfully, as they thought that the boasted civilization of the human race, with all its progress, had not as yet banished cruel and murderous war from the face of the earth; war, that scourge of mankind, as cruel now as in the grey ages of antiquity, only with this difference, that the inventive powers of man have discovered more certain and annihilating weapons.

Beside the surgeons who examined the wounds with the cold looks of science, were seen the sisters of mercy, those unwearied priestesses of Christian love: calmly and without a sound they glided between the beds, sometimes with gentle hand assisting in the placing of a bandage, sometimes with a kind consoling word putting to the pale dry lips some cooling drink, or strengthening medicine.

And everywhere amongst the busy groups were seen the beautiful and graceful ladies of Vienna, especially the ladies of the higher aristocracy, offering the sick refreshments, handing the surgeons linen bandages, and calling up a smile upon some sad suffering face.

They did not assist much, it is true, these self-constituted Samaritans, whom the love of their country moved to aid in the care of her wounded soldiers, but the sight of them did endless good to the sick and suffering; they felt that in their tenderness there was an acknowledgment of their pain and sacrifices; many of the eyes, misled by fever, believed they saw in the forms around them a sister or a sweetheart, and the vacant weary looks lighted up, the pale quivering lip gently smiled at the kind hands which thus performed the noblest work of woman--alleviating pain and soothing suffering.

So they brought pleasure and consolation to the poor wounded men, these willing nurses; though the surgeons sometimes said they were in the way; but surgeons reckon without that muscle of the heart which drives the blood streaming through the veins, not to be found by the scalpel in an anatomical examination of the human heart, with all its abysses of grief, and its tender fragrant flowers of joy; they know not its power and yet it often puts their art to shame.

The Countess Frankenstein and her daughter were soon surrounded by several ladies of the first society, and with them they began their round amongst the wounded.

Amongst the numerous women who were assembled here, and who it might almost be said followed the fashion of nursing the sick, if indeed such a word ought to be applied to so good and blessed an employment, which was generally engaged in from the noblest motives, was the beautiful Madame Balzer.

Dressed in the plainest dark grey toilette, a small basket containing bandages and nourishment upon her arm, she had followed one of the surgeons and assisted him with such skill that he had thanked her, surprised that it was apparently a lady of distinction and not a sister of mercy who had aided him so efficiently. She looked wonderfully beautiful in her simple dress, with her pale perfect features; from the unusual gracefulness of her movements, and the gentle self-possession with which she approached the beds of the sufferers, a stranger would have thought that amongst all these distinguished ladies of Vienna she was the most distinguished. These ladies, however, did not know her; several of them enquired who that lovely graceful person was, but no one could reply, for in Vienna there is not that public life which in Paris gives to the ladies of the great world the opportunity of knowing perfectly well by sight, their imitators or their models in doubtful society. The name of Madame Balzer was known to many of these ladies, she was frequently the subject of conversation in the *salons* of Vienna; but only a few of them had seen her, for she went out of doors but little and always rigorously observed *les convenances*.

She passed along by the beds of the wounded soldiers administering comfort and refreshment; at last she reached the end of a long row, and saw a litter standing at some little distance, on which a soldier lay stretched.

She went up to him and bent slowly over him, his expressionless eyes startled her, the blue corpse-like colour was spread over his pale thin face, a large gaping wound was seen on his bare breast. The wounded man had died during the journey, he must have expired quite an hour before. Involuntarily she laid her hand upon his brow, it was cold as ice.

She was gazing horrified upon this dreadful sight, when animated voices met her ear.

She looked up, and saw at a little distance a group of several ladies standing near the litter of a soldier in the Uhlan uniform; the bandage round his head had slipped and with a feeble hand he was endeavouring to replace it.

Amongst these ladies stood the lovely and graceful young countess Frankenstein. The deepest compassion shone in her eyes, but it did not banish the brilliant happiness that she felt. With a smile she said:

"This uniform must always be first with me, I almost belong to it myself!" and with a light elastic step she went up to the litter, and drawing off her gloves, and throwing back her lace sleeves, she began with her beautiful white hands to arrange the bandage for the wounded man. Over her arms hung a long strip of fine white linen, which she used to retain the bandage in its place until the surgeon should arrive.

Antonia Balzer started when she heard this voice; from her dark corner she watched the charming and beautiful young girl as she stood in the strong light with her smiling lips and brilliant eyes.

A deadly paleness spread over her face, her complexion grew as ghastly as that of the poor man who lay before her; a burning flash of which no human eyes seemed capable darted from her, wild hatred distorted her lovely features.

She gazed for one moment on the charming figure near her, then her face assumed a gloomy, dreadful expression; an indescribable smile appeared on her lips.

"Here is death, there is life!" she whispered hoarsely, and bent down over the corpse until her face was hidden, and could be recognized by no one.

She took a small pair of scissors with golden handles from her basket, and stooping over the dead man she plunged the points of the scissors deep into the wound upon his breast, then she pressed her fine cambric handkerchief upon it, and saturated it with the bloody fluid that exuded.

She sprang up hastily; her face expressed anxious excitement.

She hastened to the knot of ladies surrounding Clara Frankenstein, who was still occupied in holding the strip of linen which she had placed around the forehead of the wounded man.

"For heaven's sake!" cried Madame Balzer, "give me a strip of linen, a drop of eau de cologne! I have exhausted everything; a poor wounded man is dying!"

And hastily approaching Clara she seized her outstretched arm with both hands, as if imploring her for a piece of the linen which hung over it.

Clara uttered a cry and hastily drew back her hand. A drop of blood appeared just above her wrist and trickled slowly down her white arm.

"Oh, how clumsy of me!" cried Madame Balzer. "I have hurt you with my scissors; I beg a thousand pardons!"

And she quickly pressed the handkerchief she had applied to the wound upon the wrist of the young countess.

"Pray do not mind about it," said Clara kindly; "do not let us lose our time over this little scratch when there are so many serious wounds to think of."

And she slowly withdrew her arm, which Madame Balzer was still rubbing with her handkerchief as if to remove the blood.

Clara held out the strip of linen which she had in her hand and said:

"Pray take some."

Madame Balzer quickly cut a piece off with her scissors, returned graceful thanks, and after again apologizing for her awkwardness, returned to the corpse.

Several ladies who had witnessed the little scene hastened to the litter.

"The man is dead!" they cried, "nothing can be done here!"

Madame Balzer gazed sorrowfully on the corpse.

"Yes, he is dead!" she said, "we were too late!"

And folding her hands she bowed her head and moved her lips in whispered prayer. Deep devotion appeared on her features. The ladies around followed her example, and uttered a short prayer for the soul of the deceased, whose return was perhaps ardently desired in some distant home.

Then they all went on to other beds.

One of the few gentlemen dispersed amongst the numerous and compassionate nurses, assisting and advising, was Count Rivero.

He was not far off when Madame Balzer hurried to Clara to beg for some linen.

His large dark eyes rested thoughtfully on the two beautiful women during their short conversation; then he turned slowly away and walked in a contrary direction.

A few hours later the station was empty; the ladies had all returned either to their luxurious palaces or quiet family circles; the poor wounded soldiers had been conveyed to hospitals, to struggle to convalescence, after long days of suffering, or to die.

CHAPTER XXVI.

INSTRUMENTS OF THE CHURCH.

The morning sun shone brightly into Lieutenant von Stielow's room. But not as yesterday did he lie stretched upon his couch in happy dreams; he paced to and fro, with quick and restless footsteps, his pale face looked painfully anxious, and it was evident he had passed a sleepless night.

He had spent the evening before with Clara, in the sweet and charming converse of two loving hearts, who say so much, yet never can say enough; an hour had flown rapidly, then she had complained of violent pain from the small wound in her arm; they had applied cooling lotions, but the pain had increased, and the arm had swelled considerably. They sent for their usual medical attendant, and he had tried various remedies; but the poor girl said that the pain became still more violent; the wound was greatly inflamed and the swelling grew larger. Stielow remained at the Countess Frankenstein's house until the small hours of the morning; at last the doctor, after hearing how the injury had been received, tried a different ointment, and gave the young countess a sleeping draught.

Countess Frankenstein had insisted upon Herr von Stielow's returning home and resting a little, and she promised him early in the morning to call in the celebrated Oppolzer. No one thought there was any real danger; but the young man had passed the night in great anxiety, possessed by forebodings he could not overcome.

In the morning he sent his servant to make inquiries, and heard in reply that the countess had slept, and that Oppolzer was expected every moment. He dressed, and prepared to hasten to the countess's house.

He had on his uniform, and was just buckling his sword, when his servant announced Count Rivero.

Stielow made an impatient movement; but at the same time he gave his servant a sign to admit the visitor.

The count entered the room, looking grave, though fresh and elegant.

With a graceful bow he held out his hand to the young baron and said in his resonant voice, whilst his eyes beamed with an expression of warm friendship:

"I heard that you were here with Field-Marshal Gablenz, and I hastened to visit you before you perhaps left us again, to express my joy that you have so happily escaped the dangers of war."

"You are very kind, count," replied von Stielow in a slightly constrained tone; "I'm heartily glad to see you again."

The count seemed to expect an invitation to sit down.

Herr von Stielow looked on the ground with some embarrassment.

Then he raised his candid eyes and said:

"Count, you will forgive me if I speak quite openly to you. I beg you urgently, to repeat the honour of your visit at some other time, that I may have the happiness of increasing our acquaintance, which I hope," he added politely, "will become much more intimate; at this moment

I must own I am pressingly engaged, and in great anxiety."

"Anxiety?" asked the count, "it is not idle curiosity that urges me to inquire the cause."

"Oh! I hope it is nothing very serious," said von Stielow, "the young Countess Frankenstein--you know I am engaged?"

"I have heard so," replied the count, "and I wished to offer you my hearty congratulations."

Herr von Stielow bowed slightly, and said:

"She is unwell; an extraordinary accident has happened to her, which makes me excessively uneasy; and I was just about to hasten to hear how she was going on, and what Oppolzer, who was to meet her regular attendant this morning, had said."

"Oppolzer consulted?" cried the count with a look of alarm; "my God! is the countess then seriously ill?"

"We can scarcely think so," said von Stielow, "and yet the symptoms are very distressing; a slight wound on her wrist has become rapidly bad, and has caused her to feel so extremely ill."

"A wound!" cried the count: his face grew very grave and expressed the greatest attention.

"She was visiting the wounded soldiers at the northern railway station," said the young officer, "and another lady slightly hurt her wrist with a small pair of scissors in cutting off a piece of linen; it could scarcely be called a wound; but in the course of the evening the arm swelled and grew stiff, and became violently painful. Fever came on, and the doctor fears that there must have been some drug upon the scissors, what, he cannot ascertain. Under these circumstances," he said, pressing the count's hand, "you will forgive me, if I beg you to excuse me."

The count had listened very gravely, his face had turned pale, and his large dark eyes looked thoughtfully at the young man's excited face.

"My dear baron," he said slowly, "honestly from my heart I feel the liveliest interest in you; perhaps I can be useful to you. In former years I studied medicine deeply, especially the knowledge of poisons and their antidotes; they once," he added with a slight sigh, "played so important and frightful a part in my country, that the subject interested me deeply. If by an unhappy accident there was anything pernicious or dangerous on the scissors, I may be of some assistance. Will you allow me to see the young countess?"

And in a deep voice that seemed to command conviction, he added,

"Believe me, I would not propose my help if I did not believe that if serious danger has arisen, and help is possible, my remedy is certain."

Herr von Stielow had at first listened to the count's proposal in silent surprise, then a look of thankfulness beamed from his eyes, and stretching out his hand he cried hastily,--

"Come!"

"We must drive to my house to obtain the necessary apparatus," said the count; "if it is really a case of poisoning, recovery may depend upon moments."

Instead of replying, the young man seized the count's arm and drew him to the door.

They jumped into a cab that stood ready, driven by one of the best and quickest drivers in Vienna, and in a few minutes they had reached the count's rooms, which were only at a little distance. He got out, and soon returned with a small black casket. They then drove rapidly to Countess Frankenstein's and entered the reception room.

In the ante-room a servant had received them with a sorrowful look, and had replied almost weeping to Herr von Stielow's hasty question,

"Ah! my God! Herr Baron, it is terrible, the poor countess is dreadfully bad, they have sent for the father-confessor, and also for you, sir:" and he then hastened away to let the countess know of Stielow's arrival.

He walked up and down the room with large strides, grief and despair upon his face.

The count stood calm and motionless, his hand supported on the back of a chair.

After a few moments Countess Frankenstein appeared, she was pale and exhausted, her eyes wearied with watching and red with weeping.

She glanced with surprise at the count, whom she had seen once or twice in society, and whose presence at that moment was inexplicable to her.

Stielow hastened up to her, seized her hand impatiently, and exclaimed in a trembling voice,

"For God's sake! how is she? How is Clara?"

"Compose yourself, my dear Stielow," said the countess calmly, though with a slight sob in her voice, "the hand of the Lord has smitten us heavily; if He does not work a miracle, we must lose her!"

And she broke down and wept quietly.

"But my God! how can it be? what did the doctor say?" cried the young man, with a look of bewildered horror. "What is this wound?"

"Clara must have touched some dead soldier, the poison from some deadly wound has got into her blood, there is scarcely a hope of saving her," she said in a low voice.

"I must go to her, I must see her!" cried von Stielow wildly.

"Her confessor is with her," said the countess, "telling her of comfort and resignation; let her first be reconciled to God!"

And raising her head, she regained her composure with a violent effort, and cast an inquiring look at the count, who stood by in silence. His eyes had flashed with anger when the countess had explained the medical opinion of the nature of Clara's illness, but he had then raised them in joyful thankfulness to heaven.

As the looks of the countess rested upon him he came forward with the self-possession of a man of the world, and after bowing slightly he said:--

"You will recollect me, countess, though I have only had the honour of meeting you once or twice. I think Herr von Stielow will permit me to call myself his friend; he told me of the alarming illness that has attacked the young countess, and I offered to use the medical knowledge I acquired in earlier years on her behalf, before I knew the nature of her injury. I have now heard the dreadful danger she is in, and if you can trust me so far, I beg your permission to apply a remedy which I promise shall, God willing, be successful."

The countess listened in the greatest surprise.

"You, count, a physician?" she enquired.

"A physician from inclination," he replied, "but not a worse one than many who make it their profession."

The countess looked at him and hesitated.

"I implore you, for God's sake, let the count make the attempt," cried von Stielow, "we must accept any help,--my God, my God, I cannot lose her!"

"Count," said the Countess Frankenstein, "I thank you from my heart for your sympathy and your offer. Forgive me if I consider it," she added with hesitation, "the life of my child--"

"Consideration and hesitation may be fatal," said the count quietly.

The countess looked down thoughtfully, von Stielow's eyes hung on her face with an expression of deadly anguish.

The door leading to the inner apartments opened and Father Ignatius, the confessor to the countess and her daughter, entered.

He wore the black dress of a priest, his manner was simple, graceful, and dignified, his pale and regular features, surrounded by short black hair, expressed spiritual repose, firmness, and great self-knowledge, his dark eyes looked full of intelligence beneath the strongly marked eyebrows.

"The countess is resigned to God's will, and desirous of receiving the holy sacrament, that she may be prepared, should it please God not to hear our prayers for her recovery," he said slowly in a low and impressive voice.

"Oh! my God! my God!" cried von Stielow, in despair, "I conjure you, countess, seize on the means that heaven has sent you!"

"Count Rivero," said Countess Frankenstein, indicating the count to her confessor, "offers to save my daughter by means of a remedy which his study of medicine has caused him to discover; you will understand--I beg your forgiveness, count--that I must act cautiously where the life of my child is at stake. I expect the doctor every moment, Oppolzer too will come again,--he has indeed little hope."

Father Ignatius cast a quick searching glance at the count, who replied to it with a look of calm dignity, almost of proud superiority.

"It is certainly a grave and difficult question," said the father hesitatingly.

"Every moment makes recovery more doubtful," cried the count with some vehemence. "I believe," he then continued calmly, "that the father will be of my opinion, that in this unusual and extreme case we must try everything, and place confidence in most unusual means."

As he spoke he looked firmly at the confessor, and raising his hand slightly he made the sign of the cross in a peculiar way, over his brow and his breast.

Amazed, almost alarmed, the father gazed at him, and casting down his eyes before the count's large, brilliant orbs, he said:

"It would be sinning against Providence if we did not thankfully seize on the means which God has so visibly sent us in our urgent need. Your conscience will reproach you, countess, if you do not accept the help now offered."

Countess Frankenstein looked at the priest with some surprise.

"Come then," she said, turning to Count Rivero, after a moment's silence.

And they all went to the apartments of the young countess. The flowers still bloomed in her room, the crucifix stood in the niche, and at its feet lay the case which held the withered rose.

The portière that divided this room from her bedroom was drawn back. It was a spacious apartment hung entirely with grey silk even to the curtains of the bed, upon which lay the countess in a white négligé, supported by pillows. The sleeve of her right arm was thrown back, and the dreadfully inflamed arm was covered with a wet compress, which a maid who sat near the bed moistened constantly with some strongly smelling fluid from a medicine bottle.

Clara's face was much flushed, her eyes had the brilliance of fever, but they looked calmly resigned, as her friends entered with their sorrowful faces.

As soon as he saw the poor suffering girl, von Stielow rushed past the others, and falling on his knees beside the bed and folding his hands, cried in a stifled voice, "Clara, my Clara!"

"My own friend," she said gently, and stretched out her soft left hand towards him, "how beautiful life is, how sad to think of the death that is so near me,--God will be gracious, He will not part us!"

Stielow bent his head down upon her hand, and touched it lightly with his lips. He could not say a word. Only a deep sob broke from him.

Count Rivero approached the bed with a quick step and a commanding movement.

"Hope! countess," he said in a firm, clear voice, "God will bless my hand! And now, baron, give up your place to me, moments are precious!" He slightly touched the shoulder of the young man as he knelt.

He rose hastily and stepped aside.

The count removed the compress, and calmly examined the wound. It was much swollen, of a bluish colour, and long streaks of inflammation extended to the shoulder.

All eyes rested on the count's face with the most earnest anxiety; he looked at the wound attentively and lightly followed the swelling with his finger. Clara gazed with surprise mingled with hopeful confidence, at this man who was quite unknown to her, but who stood so quietly beside her and who had so confidently said to her, "hope!"

The count concluded his examination.

"It is quite true," he said; "corrupted matter has got into the wound, the poison has spread greatly, it is almost too late!"

He opened the black casket he had brought with him, and which he had placed beside him on the table.

It contained a small surgical apparatus, and several little cut glass bottles.

The count took a knife with a golden handle and a highly-polished shining blade.

"I beg your pardon, countess," he said in the tone of a man of the world, "I must hurt you, it is necessary."

The young countess smiled.

The count took firm hold of the suffering arm, and quick as lightning cut two deep gashes crossing each other into the wound.

Thick blood mixed with matter flowed from it.

"A handkerchief!" cried the count.

They gave him a cambric handkerchief; he quickly removed the blood, seized a glass bottle, opened the wound widely and poured into it a portion of the contents.

Clara's face grew deadly pale; she closed her eyes, her lips quivered convulsively.

"Does it hurt?" asked the count.

"Horribly!" replied the young girl in a voice that was scarcely audible.

The count took from the casket a small syringe with a sharp steel point, filled it with fluid from the bottle, and injected the contents into the flesh of the arm, following the direction of the swelling.

Clara's face showed even greater agony, the Countess Frankenstein watched the count's manipulations with the deepest anxiety, Stielow wrung his hands in silent grief, and Father Ignatius moved his lips in prayer.

The count took another bottle, half filled a glass with pure water, and slowly and carefully counted the drops as he let them fall from the fluid in the phial.

The water grew blood red, a strong, peculiar odour spread through the room.

The count touched the patient's brow lightly with his finger.

She opened her eyes; her countenance still expressed burning pain.

"Drink this!" said the count in a gentle but commanding tone. At the same time he carefully raised her head and placed the glass to her lips.

She took the contents. His eyes watched her attentively.

After a short time her face grew calmer, the contraction from the violence of the pain became less. She opened her eyes, and drew in a deep breath as if relieved.

"Ah! what good that does me!" she whispered.

An expression of satisfaction appeared on the count's face, then he said in a grave, solemn voice:

"I have done all that is possible to human art and knowledge, let us hope God's hand will shed a blessing upon my work. Pray to God, countess, fervently and with all your soul, that He may give my remedy strength to overcome the poison."

"Yes, yes," said the young girl ardently, and her eyes sought her lover; "come to me, my beloved friend!"

Herr von Stielow hastened to the bed and sank down before it with folded hands.

"I cannot put my hands together," she said in a low voice, looking at him affectionately, "so let me lay my hand in yours, and our united prayer shall ascend to heaven, that eternal mercy may permit us to remain together."

And she began whisperingly to pray, whilst the young officer's eyes were raised upwards with a look of the deepest devotion.

Suddenly a shudder passed through the form of the young countess, she withdrew her hand with a look of pain, and gazed with horror at her lover.

"Oh!" she cried in a trembling voice, "our prayers cannot really be united; what a dreadful thought, we do not pray to the same God!"

"Clara!" cried the young man, "what an idea! there is but one God in heaven, and He will hear us!"

"Ah!" she cried, without heeding his words, "there is but one God in heaven, but you do not walk in the paths that lead to Him, you are not in the bosom of the Church! Oh! I often thought of it amidst the pleasures and distractions of life; but now in this dire necessity, at the very gate of eternity, the thought fills me with horror! God cannot hear us, and," she added, with a bewildered look, "if I must die, if no help is possible, I must pass into eternity, knowing that his soul is lost! Horrible! oh, horrible!"

"Clara! Clara!" cried von Stielow in a tone of the greatest anguish, gazing in despair upon her painfully excited face, "God is the same for all those who worship Him with a pure heart, and no prayer can be more pure, more earnest than mine is now!"

Countess Frankenstein had sunk upon a chair, and covered her face with her hands, the father looked thoughtfully at the affecting scene, and the calm, perfect features of Count Rivero were

lighted up as by a sudden inspiration.

Clara gazed sorrowfully at her lover, and gently shook her head.

"You do not worship at the altars of my Church," she said; "we are apart in the highest and holiest feelings that touch the human heart!"

"Clara, my own beloved!" cried the young man, raising his folded hands, "the altar on which your pure heart worships God must be the holiest, the best. Oh! that this altar were here, that I might throw myself before it, and pray to God for your recovery!" And raising his eyes with a look of inspiration, he took the hand of his betrothed and placed it on his own. A look of unutterable delight shone in the eyes of the young countess.

"The altar of God is here!" said Count Rivero, in a tone of deep emotion. He drew from beneath his waistcoat a golden cross, upon which a marvellously beautiful figure of the Saviour was chiselled in silver. "And his priest stands beside you!"

He unfastened the crucifix from a small golden chain to which it was attached.

"There can be no higher nor holier altar than this," said he, touching the crucifix adoringly with his lips; "the Holy Father in Rome has consecrated it with his apostolic blessing. Young man," he said, turning to Stielow, who was still kneeling, but whose eyes were raised with a look half of inquiry, half of enlightened inspiration, "young man, God has indeed blessed you, in so wonderfully opening to you the way of salvation. Hear the voice of God, speaking to you through the pure lips of her you love; seize on the mercy that beckons you to the bosom of the true Church, and acknowledge God in the confession which perhaps may shortly arise from the dying lips of your betrothed to the throne of the Eternal Father. You supplicate Heaven for a miracle, the recovery of her you love, open your soul to the miraculous stream of mercy that flows towards you."

"I will!" cried Stielow, his face glowing with ardent enthusiasm.

Clara closed her eyes and pressed her hand firmly upon her lover's.

"Thou hearest it, my God," she whispered; "I thank Thee! Thy ways of mercy are holy, and above all our thoughts and hopes."

"Father," said the count with dignity, "do your duty as a priest, and receive this soul, awakened to eternal salvation, into the bosom of the one true Church!"

Father Ignatius had stood by in great emotion, his eyes beaming with satisfaction; but he replied with hesitation:

"Is it possible? Here, without preparation?"

The count slightly raised his hand.

"I undertake the responsibility," he said proudly; "the forms can be complied with hereafter," and he handed the crucifix to the father, who kissed it with veneration.

"Lay your hand upon the image of the Redeemer, and repeat what the priest of God tells you to say," said the count.

Stielow turned to the father, who approached him, and did as the count had commanded.

Steadily and solemnly the priest repeated the words of the Catholic confession of faith; the young officer repeated them after him with the greatest devotion, and Clara whispered them in a low voice; the count stood upright, his brilliant eyes raised to heaven, a smile of inspired triumph on his lips.

Countess Frankenstein had sunk upon her knees, and laid her head upon her folded hands.

The confession of faith was ended; with a humble gesture the father returned the count the crucifix, he kissed it, and again attaching it to his chain, he concealed it in his breast.

"Now unite in prayer," he said with unspeakable sympathy; "no dissonance will part you, in pure harmony your petitions will rise to the throne of eternal love and compassion."

Stielow placed his folded hands upon the bed; Clara pressed her left hand upon them, and the lips of both these young and loving creatures moved in earnest prayer to God, imploring Him to permit them to walk along the path of life together.

Thus they prayed for a long time earnestly and unitedly; their friends looked at this affecting picture without speaking. Deep silence prevailed in the room.

At last Stielow rose from his knees after lightly touching the hand of the young countess with his lips. Countess Frankenstein approached him and kissed him upon the brow. "God's blessing be upon you, my son," she said affectionately. The young man looked around him with dreamy,

glistening eyes; he felt as if descending from a strange world which was suddenly closed upon him when he looked at the objects around him, and as if he needed to recover his composure after the excitement which had shaken his inmost soul.

The count approached the bed, and examined the injured arm.

The wound was very red, and surrounded by a wreath of blisters.

Similar blisters appeared all up the arm.

"The remedy is taking effect," he said; "the poison is beginning to work out, I have a certain hope of recovery."

Herr von Stielow threw himself upon the count's breast.

"My friend for ever!" he cried, and tears flowed from his eyes.

"How shall I thank you, count?" cried Countess Frankenstein, with great emotion.

"Thank God, countess," he replied. "But," he added in the easy tone of general conversation, "I reckon upon your discretion, you must not betray me to the doctors."

He gave instructions about the further treatment of the wound, and a remedy to be used in his absence, he again administered a medicine, and left the house promising to return in a few hours.

With rapid footsteps he hastened to Madame Balzer's house; his face assumed a grave and severe expression as he ascended the steps leading to the young lady's apartments.

In the salon he found the Abbé Rosti awaiting him. The young priest sat opposite the *chaise-longue* of the mistress of the house, who was conversing gaily with him, dressed in a charming pale blue morning toilette.

The abbé rose as the count entered, and the young lady welcomed him with a graceful smile as she offered him her hand.

"We have expected you for some time," she said. "The poor abbé has been wearied with his efforts to continue a conversation with me," she added in a roguish tone. "Where were you?"

"I have been preventing the completion of a great crime," replied the count gloomily, fixing his eyes firmly upon the lady's face.

She trembled involuntarily beneath his gaze.

"A crime?" she asked, "and where was it committed?"

"It was committed," said the count quietly, without removing his eyes, "it was committed upon a pure and noble creature whom a ruthless hand had destined to a horrible death, upon the Countess Clara Frankenstein."

Madame Balzer stood stiff and motionless. A deep pallor spread over her face, her lips trembled, her eyes sank before the firm and immovable gaze of the count. Her breast heaved, she tried to speak; but only a broken hissing breath came from her lips. "Abbé", said the count raising his hand and pointing to her, "you see this woman now standing before you, who was talking to you with smiling lips, whose eyes seemed to reflect the feelings of a good and noble heart--this woman is a murderess, who with cold cruelty has poisoned the warm pure blood of an innocent human being, a being who never harmed her except that she possessed the love of a young man, for whom this woman felt a wicked passion. God willed it otherwise," he added, "and gave me the power of saving this victim of her wickedness!"

Amazed, horrified, the abbé listened to the count's words; he looked enquiringly at the beautiful and elegant woman against whom such a frightful accusation was brought.

She had pressed her hand upon her breast, as if to calm its powerful emotion. Her eyes were raised at the count's last word with an expression of fear, and raging hatred; but she could not bear his gaze, and her eyes fell again to the ground.

"Count," she said with a great effort, but in a calm and sharp voice, "you bring strange accusations against me, you speak in the voice of a judge. I do not understand you, nor do I recognize your right."

And exerting all her powers of will, she raised her eyes and gazed firmly into the count's face.

He drew himself to his full height, and stepping close up to her, and raising his hand, he said in a low voice which vibrated through the room:

"I do not speak from suspicion, I bring an accusation against you which it would be easy for me to prove; I speak as a judge, because if I would, I might be your judge, Antonia von Steinfeld."

She gazed at him with horror, all her composure left her; and broken down she sank into a chair.

"I might," proceeded the count, "be the judge of that unnatural daughter who forsook her old sick mother, a worthy lady who had educated her, by making great sacrifices, to follow the adventurous life of an actress, who stole her mother's last treasure, the title-deeds of her small estate, and whilst she lived in wild dissipation left that unhappy mother, who would not face the shame and publicity of bringing her to justice, to suffer from want, until sorrow broke her heart. I might be the judge of the worthless creature who sank deeper and deeper, until she was punished for a fresh robbery, upon a young man whom she had ensnared, by two years' imprisonment; who then as an actress travelled through most of the little towns of Bohemia and Galicia, until she succeeded in finding a man but little better than herself, who gave her his name, and placed her in a position that enabled her to continue on a large scale the course she had before commenced. I might be the judge of the murderess who planned in cold blood a horrible death for a pure and innocent girl. Do you think, wretch!" he added--and his voice sounded like distant thunder--"do you think it would cost me more than a word to strip the false spangled veil from the hideousness of your past life and give you up to the abhorrence and scorn of the world? Do you think," he cried, standing close before her, with flashing eyes, "that it would burden my conscience, by a drop of surer poison than that you placed in the veins of an innocent creature, to free the world from your sin-laden existence?"

As the count spoke, the young woman had sunk down lower and lower; as he ended she lay at his feet, her eyes stared at him as at some supernatural appearance, horror and hopeless anguish were depicted in her face.

The abbé looked with a mixture of pity and abhorrence at the broken-down creature.

The count gazed at her in silence.

"Thank God," he then said, "that the object of your murderous hate was saved by my hand, or my hand would have slain you without mercy. Try," he said after a short silence, during which, panting, and with anguish in her eyes, she had hung on his lips, "try to gain heaven's forgiveness, use the gifts nature has given you, and which you have hitherto misused in sin, in the holy service of God and his Church. You shall serve me as a tool; and for the sake of the cause to which you shall be dedicated, perhaps it may be possible for you to gain forgiveness of the past."

She looked at him enquiringly; life and hope returned to her face.

"I demand no promises from you, I shall see what you do, and whether your obedience stands the test,--remember that even when I am far away, my eyes will be upon you, that my hand can always reach you, and that vengeance will fall upon your head if you deviate one hair's breadth from the path which I lay down for you. I shall free you from every chain that fetters you here, you shall be free in my service, to use your powers under my direction; but once more: Take heed not to follow your own way, it will lead you to hopeless destruction."

She rose slowly and stood before him, with downcast eyes, her hands crossed upon her breast; it was hard to say what was in her mind, but her features expressed only deep humility and submission.

The count looked at her for a moment in silence.

"I have spoken," he said; "I shall not warn, but punish, if my words are forgotten."

She bent her head in silence.

Then the solemn earnestness vanished from his face, and his features resumed their usual easy repose.

"Is Herr Balzer at home?" he asked.

"I think so," she replied in a low voice; "he asked to see me a short time ago."

"I wish to speak to him," said the count.

She bowed in silence and left the room.

"What a scene!" cried the young abbé, shuddering, "and what a dreadful woman!"

The count looked thoughtfully before him.

"Do you believe," asked the abbé, "that she will heed your warning? that she will repent and amend?"

"I do not know," said the count calmly, "we must hope her heart may at last be opened to grace, in that case she would be an instrument of priceless worth."

"What are your views?" asked the young priest with surprise.

The count slowly placed himself in an arm-chair and signed to the abbé to seat himself beside him.

"My young friend," he said in a grave mild voice, "you belong to the Holy League, you are a soldier of the Church militant, you have genius, courage, and faith; you are called to labour with me in the erection of God's kingdom upon earth, to build up the temple of promise, upon the rock of St. Peter; I tell you a great battle, a great work, is before you, a work upon a new foundation."

He was silent--lost in thought.

"What we have done hitherto has crumbled to pieces," he said after a time; "a new phase begins--Austria has denied the very ground-work of her existence, she has denied the Church, upon whose soil the empire has grown up; through which alone it could have been maintained, and guided safely through the future. The first step upon this path will swiftly be followed by others, according to the merciless law of logical consequences; we must strike Austria out of our reckoning. Whether we can rely upon France is not clear to me, it might appear so from the first glance, but the present government of France affords no guarantee, a hellish power prevails there, and this power has been the first to lay hands upon the ancient and holy rights of the Church. I see," he continued, as if lost in the contemplation of the picture presented to his mind, "the world forming itself anew. I see the German nation slowly arising to supreme eminence. Is it the will of Providence that the realm of Germany, once the foremost backslider, shall now be the firm foundation-stone of the kingdom of God? The future will show," he said after a pause, "but we must be upon the watch, we must regard these new times with a sharp glance, that we may lay the foundation of our power, and be able to guide events with a firm hand. What we may have to do does not yet appear,--here at least *nothing* can be done, here are only ruins tottering to their fall. I am going to Paris," he added, raising his head, "that is the centre of coming events, there we shall discover the threads which will bind the world. You will accompany me?" he asked, half as a question, half as a command.

The abbé bowed.

"I am prepared," he replied, "to follow your guidance, and it fills me with joy and pride to labour under such a master."

"I shall take this woman with me," said the count, "I shall free her from her present connexion, and place her in a position where her eminent talents may be developed: she will, now that she knows she is in my power, do us great service."

The abbé looked amazed.

"This woman?" he said; "ought we to defile our holy cause with such a tool?"

The count fixed his large expressive eyes firmly upon the young priest.

"Are you then assailed by that doubt of weak souls," he said slowly, "who desire the end, but fear to use the means?"

"Can sin serve heaven?" asked the abbé with hesitation.

The count rose, and spoke in a tone of firm and full conviction.

"Does not the tempest-flash, that slays and burns the huts of poverty, serve the eternal councils of God? are not all the destructive powers of nature wonderful instruments in the hand of God? This is the almighty power of God, that the evil should serve the good, and lead to a good end. Even that great German poet who did not belong to the faith, painted his devil more truly and more rightly than the world believes; as a power who wills evil, yet must do good! Well," he cried, "we desire to be soldiers of the Church militant, we wish to overcome her enemies, and to help on the triumph of the Cross; and shall we like cowards shrink back before the devil? Shall we acknowledge and fear his power? No, we must have strength in ourselves to compel the hellish powers of darkness to the service of heaven; that is the true victory over sin; not the victory of the fearful schoolboy, who flies, that he may not be overcome, but the victory of our Master and our Lord, who in the name of God subdued the fallen angels, and fought against the powers of the world."

"Forgive me," said the abbé in a tone of doubt, "but is it not presumption in us, who are but weak sinful creatures, to try to govern the powers of darkness as the hand of Almighty God does, and can? may we not become their prey, whilst we think we rule them?"

The count looked at him severely, almost angrily.

"The world," he said, "fights against us with every means she possesses, she loves to choose the best and sharpest weapons; shall we pursue our holy war unequally armed, and thus prepare for ourselves certainty of defeat? No! a thousand times No! our hand must bear the sharpest and the surest weapons, sharper and surer than our enemies'! The sword slays," he added, "and it is written: 'Thou shalt not kill!' Yet behold the thousands who wear the sword and spend their lives in learning most scientifically the art of slaying! Why are they not condemned, these armies? Why are they crowned with laurels, when they return victorious after slaying thousands and thousands

of innocent men? Because they draw their swords to serve a good and a true principle, to defend their hearths, to defend the glory and the greatness of their country. And their country belongs to this world, belongs to this fleeting earth! Yet shall we hesitate to draw the sword in defence of our spiritual home? in defence of the glory, the power, and the greatness of the eternal country of the human race, the invisible, most holy kingdom of God? Truly, my young friend, those who for the things of this world draw the sword, and shed the blood of their fellow-men, have no right to fetter us in the choice of the weapons with which we strive for the eternal and imperishable good. But it is above all our enemies who would place only blunt weapons in our hands, that their victory may be certain; and if they succeed in casting doubts into our souls, the battle is gained beforehand. Banish doubt from your heart, strengthen your soul, or your hand will bear the sword for the warring Church of Christ in vain!"

The abbé bowed his head.

"Forgive the hesitation of a youthful heart," he said in a low voice, "I will wrestle and pray that I may be girded with the strong panoply of faithful obedience."

The count looked at him kindly.

"Pray to God," he said, "that your heart may be nerved and steeled, without having to pass through the pain and despair mine suffered before it attained to calm firmness and clear conviction."

He stepped closer to him, and laid his hand upon his shoulder.

"I too," he said in a gentle voice, "was young like yourself, I was cheerful and happy as you are, I had a wife whom my soul adored, I had a daughter two years old whose pure eyes seemed to me a greeting from heaven. I was a surgeon in Rome, my hand was skilful, riches streamed down upon me. I loved all mankind, when I put my arm around my wife and held my sweet child upon my knee. To help all who were suffering was my most holy endeavour, my thank-offering for all the happiness that God had bestowed upon me. And I had a brother," he added, with a dreamy look, searching amongst the memories of the past; "I loved him from his tenderest childhood, I was older than he, and I had formed his mind, and educated his heart. He was a disciple of the noble art of painting, that fair flower of my lovely country, and I saw with pride the creations of his pencil, in which the breath of genius lived, and which approached nearer and nearer to the great works of the ancients. It was a good and happy time. My brother wished to try his pencil on the highest and holiest subject art can create, the divinely blessed Virgin with the Child Jesus. My wife sat to him as a model, my child upon her lap was to represent the Divine Child. Was it a sin, a presumptuous crime? The great Raphael had painted the forms of earthly women for his madonnas, and yet the wonderful spirit of divinity had enlightened his eyes. I rejoiced, and was happy in the thought that by the hand of my brother all that I loved on earth might be united to do God service. I was absent long hours in the exercise of my profession," he continued in a gloomy voice, "and one day when I returned, they had vanished! My brother had tempted my wife away, or she him, I know not which--I know nothing except that they were gone, and that they had taken my innocent child with them, that her pure eyes might bring me no comfort in my loneliness!"

He said the last words lower and lower, his eyes seemed far away, his features trembled with painful emotion.

He sank down into an arm-chair as if exhausted, the abbé looked at him with much sympathy.

"It is long since I have spoken of this," said the count after a moment, in a calm and melancholy voice, "since I have probed my wound with words. You see," he said, with an indescribably sad smile, "the wound is not yet healed.--All my inquiries were in vain," he then proceeded; "I could find no trace of the fugitives. Shall I describe my feelings? It would be hard to find human language to express them. I despaired of God, my soul revolted wildly against heaven; I wished to put an end to my life, and only a slight hope of recovering my child, my poor, innocent child, made me delay my resolution from day to day. I abhorred mankind, I withheld the help of my knowledge from the sick, from the dying; I rejoiced with cold malice when fathers died, when children were torn from their parents, whilst an operation from my skilful hand would have saved them. I hated and despised governments and communities; could their laws, and their institutions, punish or prevent such crimes as had been committed against me? If I could have destroyed the whole human race with one word, I would have spoken that word with a scornful smile, and have reduced every living creature to eternal nothingness! Oh! my young friend," he said, with a heavy sigh, "those were frightful days and nights that I passed through; my spirit went down into hell, and I felt what seethes and ferments in its depths! In my breast its horrible, yelling voices resounded; I, too, pronounced that 'No' against the decrees of the Creator, against the God of mercy and of love! An old worthy priest, a valiant warrior of the Church, came to me; he forced himself upon me, and the fiery rays of his eloquence aroused an angry tempest in the midnight of my soul, every fibre of my being shuddered. But after the storm came light. I learned from my wise teacher and guide, that no decree of government or of society, however well-founded, however wise, can banish sin. That power belongs to the Holy Church alone, that community ordained of God, and when at last she possesses the world in her all-powerful grasp, sin will be vanquished, and crime will vanish from the earth. I learned to know that there is no higher, no holier calling than this, to strive that all things may be committed to the power of the

Church, that the work of our Saviour's redemption may be completed, that the blood of Christ may flow down upon all mankind; there is no prouder, no more glorious deed possible, than to compel sin itself to the service of heaven. But," he continued, and his eyes glowed with energy and indomitable will, "I also saw the frightful weapons of the Church's foes, and I learnt that victory can only be obtained by seizing with a firm, relentless hand all the weapons of the will and the mind; above all, by grasping with an iron hand all the evil powers of the sinful world, and compelling them to serve the Holy Cause, by an annihilating warfare against each other. I dedicated my life to the cause of the Church militant, and God strengthened my heart and enlightened my mind, and he gave me power over men to guide the threads of their fate. I have often held a fearful and demoniacal power; but my good angel has not failed me, the hellish power has served heaven, as the gigantic power of steam obeys the pressure of the human hand. And ought I to hesitate and doubt," he cried passionately, "in the choice of the weapons whereby the victory, the great and holy victory, may be won? ought I to throw away the power I have gained over the enemy, and make myself and the cause I serve the laughing-stock of the world? Oh! I fear not the powers of hell, this hand is strong enough to bend them to my will, and in the name of God to compel the evil ones to work his good pleasure!"

The abbé looked with admiration at the count's perfect and animated face.

"Forgive me, my master," he said humbly, "if I doubted; and do not withdraw your strong hand from me, to guide and to support."

The count held out his hand.

"Your powers, too, will be steeled in the battle," he said, "but never forget that though man, the weak and sinful creature, may venture to wield these weapons, only he has a right to seize them who renounces all, that he may live and die an instrument to increase the glory of God!"

The door opened, Herr Balzer entered.

He saluted the count with his usual vulgar familiarity, and the shameless confidence habitual to him.

The count responded by a proud inclination of the head, and looked at him coldly.

"You wished to speak to me, count," said Herr Balzer, "how can I serve you?"

"I hope our conversation will be short," replied the count, "I have a proposal to make to you which you will accept, as it will free you from a very bad position."

Herr Balzer was alarmed at the severe, decided tone in which the count spoke to him. His confidence seemed to give way a little.

"A proposal?" he said with surprise; then he added with a vulgar laugh, "I always like to hear proposals, especially if acceptable."

"I wish your wife to be perfectly free," said the count shortly.

"That will be a little difficult!" cried Herr Balzer with a look of satisfaction, "a separation--she must turn Protestant, and the scandal----"

"She would be free--as a widow," said the count.

Herr Balzer sprang backwards from the speaker.

He looked round anxiously, then he gazed into the count's calm face, and said, with a constrained smile:

"You jest, sir?"

"Certainly not," said the count; "you will have the goodness to listen to me quietly and without interruption, and I do not doubt that you will perfectly agree with me."

Herr Balzer seemed not to know what he thought of this strange calm man, but he bent his head as an intimation that he was willing to hear.

In the simplest way in the world the count proceeded:

"Your affairs, sir, are in a desperate state; you are not only a bankrupt, but you have almost from the commencement of your financial existence only concealed your old debts by incurring larger ones, a course which necessarily would bring you to complete ruin in the end."

Herr Balzer looked at the count in great surprise.

"The moment of unavoidable ruin has come," he said, "I am in possession of a number of demands upon you, which if presented must infallibly overthrow your credit. Beside this, your position is most unhappily compromised, since you have, to save yourself, or rather to stave off the time of inevitable ruin, pursued the plan of forging various bills of exchange."

"Count," cried Herr Balzer in a voice whose impudence ill concealed his fear, "I----"

With a proud movement the count imposed silence.

He drew from his pocket several bills of exchange.

"You see," he said, turning them over, "the forged bills are in my hands, a prison will be your destination if I give these into the hands of a magistrate."

Every trace of self-confidence had disappeared from Herr Balzer's common-looking face. "With bewildered fear he looked at the count without speaking a word.

"You are a lost man," he said coldly, "and if you have a spark of honour left, you will prefer death to the future before you."

Herr Balzer raised his hands in speechless agony, as if imploring the count for mercy.

He looked at him severely and proceeded:

"I will not, however, destroy you, I will give you the opportunity of beginning a new life."

A ray of joy shone in the exchange-agent's eyes; he did not yet understand, but he began to hope.

"Count," he cried, "command----"

"Hear first what I demand; upon your implicit obedience your future will depend."

Herr Balzer listened anxiously.

"You will go at once to Gmünden," said the count, "from thence you will write a letter to your wife, in which you will say that you cannot bear the disgrace of bankruptcy, and that you prefer death; you will then take care that your hat, your stick, and a glove or pocket-handkerchief are found floating on the water, where the lake is the deepest. After this is accomplished, you will cut off your beard, put on a wig, and go to Salzburg, where at this address a certain person will provide you with a passport and the sum of five thousand gulden."

He gave Herr Balzer a card with some writing upon it.

"You will then," he continued, "proceed to Hamburg, and embark in the first ship for New York, and there you will go to those who will be pointed out to you by the person in Salzburg. They will give you every information, and assist you in commencing a new life, if you forget your name and the past. Remember that you are watched, and that you will be destroyed if you are not perfectly obedient!"

Herr Balzer's face had at first only expressed utter amazement, then a look of scorn and wicked satisfaction passed over his features, finally he gazed thoughtfully before him.

"Do you accept my proposals of safety?" asked the count.

"And my bills of exchange?" asked Balzer, looking ashamed.

"I have bought them, they will stay in my pocketbook," replied the count.

"I accept," said Herr Balzer, "you shall be satisfied with me. But," he added, with an extremely repulsive smile, "five thousand gulden is not much--you value my wife at very little."

"You shall receive the same sum when you arrive in New York," said the count coldly, "if you obey me implicitly."

"I will go," said Herr Balzer. "May I not," he added with a look of grief that was badly acted, "bid my wife farewell?"

"No," replied the count, "she shall believe you are really dead, that is my express will; she shall be free, even in her conscience."

Herr Balzer turned to go.

"I shall expect news of you from Salzburg in three days!" said the count. "And now," he added solemnly and earnestly, "thank heaven, and make use of the mercy that offers you a new life!"

He held out his hand to him, and mildness and kindness shone in his eyes.

Herr Balzer bowed and left the room.

"We are now ready," said the count, as soon as he was alone with the abbé; "be prepared to start in a week's time."

CHAPTER XXVII.

HIETZING.

The large and extensive Castle of Schönbrunn is beautifully situated, it is surrounded by an enormous and ancient park with artistically arranged ruins, with allegorical fountains, with deep shady groves, and sunny level lawns; behind the castle, airily perched on the summit of the height, is the triumphal arch called the Gloriette, from whence the great Empress Maria Theresa could behold Vienna, which with the lofty tower of St. Stephen appears upon the horizon.

Near to this imperial residence, full of remembrances of the Empress Queen and of Napoleon I., (whose eagles may still be seen upon the two obelisks at the principal entrance,) and around the spacious park, lies pretty Hietzing, that favourite summer retreat of the Viennese. Villa adjoins villa, and in the beautiful summer afternoons all the fashionable world of Vienna streams out to hear the concerts in the large gardens of the "Neue Welt," or of "Dommayer's Casino," and to walk in the shady alleys of the park of Schönbrunn, which is always open to the public.

Since the time when Napoleon I. fixed his head-quarters in Maria Theresa's favourite residence, and caused the "old guard" to parade in the spacious court of the castle, Hietzing had not been so animated or so full as in the autumn of 1866.

The Saxon army was encamped in and around Hietzing; King John inhabited the Stöckl, that small palace at the entrance of the park which Maria Theresa had built for her celebrated physician van Swieten; and the King of Hanover, who on his first arrival in Vienna had resided at the house of his ambassador, General von Knesebeck, had now retired to the Duke of Brunswick's villa at the farther end of the pretty village, from which it was separated by a long high wall, which concealed the wonderful art treasures and whimsical arrangements in the park and the interior of the house.

The Saxon troops, the suites of the two princes, the equipages of the arch-dukes and of the Austrian aristocracy, who vied with each other in attentions to the kings who were now suffering from the effects of the Austrian policy, filled the streets of Hietzing in a varied and brilliant manner; the inhabitants of Vienna streamed out more numerously than ever, and if anyone had cause to be satisfied with the catastrophe of 1866 it was certainly the possessors of the "Neue Welt," and "Dommayer's Casino."

One morning in that remarkable and eventful time, two persons met in the large central salon of the Brunswick villa.

The walls of this apartment were hung with Chinese tapestry, the embroidered figures of the inhabitants of that great empire, with faces exactly resembling those painted on their china, looked down complacently from the walls, the whole of the furniture was of costly Chinese work, life-sized pagodas stood in the corners, Chinese mats of the finest rice-straw covered the floors; the large glass doors were open and let the mild air blow in from the well-kept park. All the curiosities in this salon, which gave it rather the appearance of a museum than of a dwelling-room, did not attract one look from the two men who paced up and down, with sad and mournful faces.

One of these persons was Count Alfred Wedel, whom we met with before in Hanover during the catastrophe of the month of June. He wore his undress court uniform, a blue coat with a scarlet collar; beside him was a small and delicate-looking man of about thirty-six years of age, with thin fair hair and a long light moustache; his features expressed great energy, and quick lively intelligence. He wore the uniform of a captain of infantry in the Hanoverian army.

"Yes, my dear Düring," said Count Wedel, in a melancholy voice, "all is over,--Hanover exists no more,--you are the last man who waved our banner; would to God," he added with a sigh, "that our generals had been as energetic as you were, it would have been better for us."

"I cannot indeed understand," said Captain von Düring, "how everything happened; I have only been able to follow the campaign from vague reports; but I can comprehend neither the military nor the political operations!"

"Who can understand them?" cried Count Wedel with bitterness, "least of all, I believe, those who conceived them."

"Do you believe the annexation of Hanover will really take place?" asked von Düring.

"I believe it is certain," said Count Wedel; "the expressions used by the Prussian magistrates in Hanover leave us in no doubt about it, it is no use ignoring the sad fact; but," he said, "we are called!"

A bell sounded from the adjoining room.

A moment afterwards the king's groom of the chambers appeared.

"His majesty requests you, gentlemen, to go to him."

He opened the door into the king's cabinet.

Count Wedel and Captain von Düring entered.

The cabinet that George V. inhabited was hung with silken tartan, beautiful specimens of Scotch weapons, and masterly paintings representing scenes from Sir Walter Scott's novels, adorned the walls. Before a large table in the midst of the room stood the king; his beautiful, expressive countenance was very sad. He wore the loose grey overcoat belonging to the uniform of his Austrian regiment.

"God bless you, gentlemen," said King George with a gracious smile, as he held out his hand, which Count Wedel and Captain von Düring pressed to their lips; "much has happened since we parted, my dear Alfred."

"Your majesty," said Count Wedel in a trembling voice, "whatever has happened, or whatever may happen, my heart remains ever the same."

"You bring me news of the queen?" asked the king.

"Certainly, your majesty," replied the count, producing several letters and handing them to the king; "a letter from her majesty, notes from the princesses, and a report from Herr von Malortie upon your private estates."

The king laid the letters before him on the table.

"How is the queen?" he asked, "how does she bear these sorrowful times?"

"Her majesty is calm and dignified," said the count, "but very unhappy, the queen desires most earnestly to join your majesty as soon as possible."

A deep shadow passed over the king's brow.

"Whether God will bring us together again," he said, "lies in the dark womb of the future; at present the queen must remain where she is, and represent the government; such is my will."

Count Wedel was silent.

"How is the countess?" asked the king.

"I thank your majesty, she is arranging the house, and will soon follow me."

"Follow you?" asked King George.

"Your majesty," said Count Wedel with emotion, "I have not come to bring you intelligence and to return. I have come to remain, if you do not send me away!"

The king looked at him inquiringly.

"Your majesty," said the count, "from all I see and hear, you will not return, at least not for a long time, to Hanover. Your majesty made me your chamberlain, and I have performed my duty about your person with pride. Your majesty is now in exile," he continued, his voice almost failing him: "I beg for the great honour of sharing your exile, and retaining my office!"

The king was silent for a moment. He slightly bit his moustache, a sorrowful expression appeared on his face.

"My dear Alfred," he then said in a gentle voice, "you have just built a house and newly furnished it. The countess is delicate, I am sure of your faithfulness and devotion, but you must think of your family. You would make too great a sacrifice; leave my service and this court,--the court of banishment," he said sadly, "to those who are alone in life, and have only themselves to think of."

"Your majesty," cried Count Wedel hastily, interrupting the king, "you will hurt me much if you do not accept my service, if you forbid me the honour of standing beside you in misfortune; I shall not leave you," he added with blunt frankness, "and if you do not allow me to be your chamberlain, at least I will be the courtier of misfortune."

A joyful smile passed over the king's face.

"Misfortune has its charms," he said, "it teaches us to know our true friends. We will speak more of this hereafter. And now, my dear Captain von Düring," he said, turning towards him, "I have heard of your wonderful march, tell me about it, I wish to hear how you found it possible to wave the banner of Hanover to the very end, after I had been forced to lower it," he added, with a

sorrowful sigh.

"Your majesty," said Captain von Düring, "I was at Emden with my company, an overwhelming force of the enemy desired me to capitulate, I declared that I would rather be buried beneath the ruins of the town than lay down my arms; they then granted me a free retreat. I withdrew," he continued, "with my company towards Holland. A large number of young men from every district joined me. I procured a number of passports partly by persuasion, partly from a list of pass formularies, I filled them in and distributed them amongst my soldiers. They had to pack up their arms and their uniform and thus they took them with them to the Hague. Here I found your majesty's resident minister, Count George Platen."

"An excellent young man!" cried the king.

"A true servant of your majesty, full of energy and zeal," said Captain Düring; "I received from him a hearty reception and the warmest support. Here I heard of the battle of Langensalza, and we celebrated the victory with the greatest joy, for we were then convinced that the army had cut its way through to the south."

"It ought to have done so!" said the king gloomily.

"We considered," proceeded Captain von Düring, "how it was possible for my company to reach the army,--there was but one way, through France--"

"Through France!" cried the king.

"Yes, your majesty," said Captain von Düring, "it was a risk but I ventured it. We got into the railway train as simple passengers, and happily we all succeeded in avoiding the notice of the French authorities, and in detached parties by the roundabout way of Thionville, Metz, and Karlsruhe, we reached Frankfort. The order, prudence, and punctuality of the soldiers was exemplary."

"What a marvellous march!" said the king.

"In Frankfort," continued Captain von Düring, "I applied to the president of the Confederation, who supplied me with means for purchasing fresh uniforms for my soldiers; the Duke of Nassau gave us arms, a committee of the citizens provided us with linen and other equipments, and in a fortnight I had 350 men armed and ready for the field. I made the best non-commissioned officers into officers, and we were about to join the garrison of Mayence, there to educate my quickly organized troops by active service. In Frankfort I heard of the capitulation of Langensalza,--forgive me, your majesty, I cannot understand it."

"I was surrounded by superior forces," said the king, "I could not uselessly sacrifice my troops to certain destruction."

"I perfectly understand that *your majesty* was forced thus to act," said Captain von Düring, "but I do not understand the operations that placed the army in such a position."

The king was silent.

"The capitulation did not affect me," continued Captain von Düring, "it only concerned the army actually at Langensalza, and I had received no intelligence, no commands. I remained under arms until the end."

He then added in a low sad voice:

"When all was at an end I disbanded my corps and sent my soldiers back to their homes, but I came here to announce myself to your majesty, and to report to you my useless attempts."

"Not useless, my dear Captain von Düring," said the king kindly, "you could no longer obtain victory for my cause, circumstances made that impossible, but under the greatest difficulties, to the very bounds of possibility, you did your duty, and you set all the officers of my army a fine example, that cannot be lost."

The king was silent for a moment.

"What are your views for the future?" he then asked.

"Your majesty," said Captain von Düring sadly, "I will not enter the Prussian service; they want officers in Turkey, so does the Viceroy of Egypt. I know Eastern affairs from the permission your majesty gave me to serve for two years with the French army in Algeria, I think of seeking a career in the East."

"Will you stay with me?" he then asked.

"Your majesty," cried Captain von Düring, "my wishes are nothing, you have but to command,--it would be my greatest happiness; yet," he added with some hesitation, "I must tell your majesty plainly, that idleness is contrary to my whole nature."

"You shall not be unemployed, my dear Düring," said the king, proudly raising his head. "I have every intention of again obtaining my inheritance, and when the political situation permits the attempt I shall require men capable of forming an army, and of leading it."

Captain von Düring's face brightened.

"Your majesty," he cried, "I can only lay my sword, my life, and my future at the feet of my king."

"I appoint you my equerry," said the king, "remain here, you shall do no court duty," he added, laughing. "Au revoir, I shall expect you to dinner at five o'clock."

Captain von Düring bowed low.

"I cannot express to your majesty the gratitude I feel," he said; "may I have the opportunity of proving it by my deeds!"

And he left the cabinet.

"Has your majesty any commands for me?" asked Count Wedel.

"Did the queen give you no commission to me?" asked the king in a penetrating voice.

"Commission?" said the count, "no, only to deliver the letters which I have had the honour of presenting to your majesty, but--"

"But?" asked the king anxiously.

"I perceived," said the count, "that the queen ardently wishes your majesty could follow the advice given you by so many well-wishers, and--"

"And that I should abdicate?" said the king passionately.

"Her majesty believes that thus the crown would be preserved in the royal family," said the count, "and she regrets that your majesty does not seize upon this sad and deplorable means of safety; the queen thinks you might still be in time; but that your majesty is withheld by those around you."

"And what do you think? I wish to hear your honest opinion," asked King George.

"Your majesty," said Count Wedel slowly, "is convinced of my entire devotion to your person; but since you ask the question, I must reply uprightly and honestly, that if by your majesty's abdication the crown could be saved for the house of Guelph--"

"*If* it could!" said the king earnestly.

He came a few steps nearer, feeling his way with his hand, and seized the count's arm.

"I wish," he said, "that this point should be perfectly plain to you; for no accusation could pain me more, than that I had sacrificed the future of my family to my personal inclinations. I do not know by whom, or with what views the queen and the country have been told that my abdication would preserve the independence of Hanover, and prevent her annexation to Prussia; that it is only with me that Prussia refuses to conclude peace; I will not try to discover what motives have induced various persons to speak in this manner."

"Counts Münster, Windthorst," said Count Wedel, "they certainly hope to be all-powerful ministers under the rule of the crown prince."

"No matter who it is," proceeded the king; "I can understand how the queen, how several of the most important members of my family, may credit these assurances; only it hurts me to think that they can believe I should not long ago have seized upon this means of saving the crown, if it would have saved it. When this opinion was urged upon me from every side; when the queen telegraphed begging me to abdicate," continued the king more slowly, "I determined to take a step which should make my duty upon this point plain. If my abdication could preserve my crown for my descendants," he said with emphasis, "it was my duty to abdicate, if not, it was my duty to refuse all such propositions. I sent the minister for education, von Hodenburg, who was here, to Berlin, to ask Count Bismarck plainly, whether my abdication would preserve the crown for my son."

"Ah!" exclaimed Count Wedel.

"Late one evening," added the king, "Herr von Hodenburg had a long interview with Count Bismarck. He declared with a candour and honesty that did him honour, that the incorporation of Hanover was quite resolved upon, that for the interests and the safety of Prussia the step was absolutely necessary, and that my abdication would not affect it in the least. Hodenburg told the count that the people of Hanover would greatly resent an incorporation with Prussia, and that it would create endless difficulties; the count replied that he knew well it would be so, but that he could not be in error in doing what he believed to be his duty towards his king and his country.

But," he said, interrupting himself, "this is only hearsay; through Lex, I will give you Herr von Hodenburg's report, read it all through, it is very interesting; but, you now know the answer I received to my direct question,--tell me, what do you think?"

"Your majesty is right,--right a thousand times," cried Count Wedel; "I see afresh how easy it is to judge falsely when you do not know all the circumstances."

The groom of the chambers opened both the folding doors and exclaimed:

"His majesty the King of Saxony!"

King George took the count's arm. Supported by his chamberlain he walked quickly through the Chinese anteroom.

At the further door of this apartment appeared the somewhat bent and slender form of King John, with his sharply-cut profile, his bright eyes full of genius, and his grey hair. Behind him walked his equerry, Colonel von Thielau. The king wore the uniform of a Saxon general. He hastened to meet King George and seized his hand. Count Wedel stepped back.

King George took the King of Saxony's arm, and guided by him returned to his cabinet. The groom of the chambers shut the doors.

King John led the King of Hanover to the chair before his table, and drew forward one of the arm-chairs standing near for himself. They both seated themselves.

"I wished to come to you at once," said the King of Saxony, "to tell you that the foundations of my peace with Prussia were concluded."

"You will then return?" asked King George.

"Not yet," replied the King of Saxony, "the completion of the conditions requires some time, and the troops cannot return until all the new arrangements are definitely made."

"And you are satisfied?" asked the King of Hanover.

King John sighed.

"I am satisfied," he said, "thus far,--Saxony will not be taken from my family; for the rest, the cause for which I fought is defeated,--the vanquished must accept their fate."

"My fate too is that of the vanquished," said King George in a sad voice.

The King of Saxony seized his hand, in great emotion.

"Believe me," he said affectionately, "that no one feels for you more deeply, more heartily than I do; but," he added, "believe me also when I say, that as far as my personal feelings go, I would far rather be in your position than in my own. Rather, far rather would I abandon public life, withdraw into seclusion, and devote the remainder of my days to philosophy and the arts, than begin life afresh under new and strange, oppressive and humiliating conditions."

King George bowed his head with a sorrowful look.

"And," added King John passionately, "Germany will be divided; instead of one united, federal Germany, we shall be split into two warring halves. Oh!" he cried, "for Germany, for her greatness and her power, I would make any sacrifice; but will the end be reached by this path?"

And thoughtfully he gazed before him.

"What do the Saxons themselves say to this new state of affairs? will it not create great difficulties?" asked the King of Hanover.

"The Saxon people, as well as myself, will have to go through many sorrowful experiences," replied King John gravely; "but when I have once signed my name beneath the Treaty of Peace, my word must be respected and held sacred under all circumstances, and my people will support me. I have but one wish," he added, with a deep sigh, "that the painful sacrifices I make may give to Germany unity and greatness."

"Germany will not in this way attain to real safety, or to true greatness!" cried the King of Hanover.

King John was silent.

"I must give up my minister von Beust," he said after a pause.

"Do they demand this at Berlin?" asked the King of Hanover.

"Not exactly, but it comes almost to the same thing; besides, his position would be almost an impossible one. I am sorry, for his talents would have assisted me greatly in the difficulties arising from the new arrangements. Perhaps," continued the king, "a wider field will be opened

to his genius. The emperor gave me an intimation from which it appears the idea has occurred to him of employing Beust, instead of Mensdorff, who neither can nor will remain in office."

"Herr von Beust here in Austria?" exclaimed the king in great surprise.

"Yes," said the King of Saxony thoughtfully, "he would meet with difficulties; the Archduke Albert and the Archduchess Sophia feel a great repugnance to the plan; it is, of course, a matter of profound secrecy during the present uncertain state of affairs."

"Certainly," said King George. "What does Beust think he can do with Austria? he is taking a difficult position, the more difficult from the many inimical elements he would have to encounter at home."

"One important element he thinks he can overcome, and reconcile to the House of Hapsburg: Hungary, who has so long been discontented, will find it impossible to continue her displeasure, as he will at once restore to her the self-government she demands."

"Remove the centre of gravity to Pesth," said King George with some bitterness, "as Bismarck advised."

"A second centre of gravity will remain in Vienna," returned the King of Saxony, "and the balance of power between the two will create the future strength of Austria."

"But the Church," asked the King of Hanover, "will she regard Beust favourably?"

"I avoid speaking upon Church questions," said King John gravely, "happily, from the constitution of Saxony, I have never been placed in the painful position of deciding between political necessity and my religions convictions. Have you good news of the queen?" he said, changing the subject.

"I thank you," replied King George, "she is as well as painful circumstances permit."

"I admire her heroic courage and her dignified bearing," said the King of Saxony; after a short pause he added--

"Shall you remain here, or go to England?"

"To England?" cried King George, "to England, who moved not a finger to assist me, or to defend the country that had given her a glorious race of kings, the country whose sons had shed their blood in England's wars? No! I will remain here, here in the house my cousin has so kindly placed at my disposal. Here, at least, I am upon Guelphic soil," he tapped his foot on the ground, "here I will remain until the tide of misfortune turns."

"You believe a change is possible in our present fate?" asked King John with some surprise.

"I do believe it," said the King of Hanover firmly.

"But," said King John, "we shall embarrass Austria, about whose power we were so much deceived, if we stay here; our position will be painful."

"Here in quiet Hietzing," replied King George, "I shall not embarrass the political world of Vienna, though perhaps," he added with dignity, "I may be a living reminiscence of duties that cannot be stripped off."

The King of Saxony stood up. King George also rose.

"I expect my son," said King John, "he will pay his respects to you."

"I shall be delighted to see the crown prince," said King George.

The King of Saxony pressed the King of Hanover's hand,--he rang, the folding doors were thrown open, and arm in arm the two princes walked through the reception room. King George accompanied his guest to the door of the house, and then returned, guided by Count Wedel who had followed him, to his cabinet.

Count Platen and Herr Meding had in the meantime arrived in the ante-room.

The groom of the chambers announced them to the king.

"Call the crown prince and the privy councillor," said King George.

After a few minutes Prince Ernest Augustus and Herr Lex entered the king's cabinet, Count Platen and Herr Meding followed them. At a sign from the king they all seated themselves around the table.

The king began in a grave voice:

"The incorporation of Hanover with Prussia is determined upon irrevocably; I am in a great difficulty, gentlemen, and I wish to hear your advice. As you are aware, the English government

has offered to mediate for the recovery of the property belonging to my family; it has also expressed a wish that my army should be released from its oath of fealty, by which means the negotiations as to my property would be made much easier. My personal inclination prompts me simply to decline the negotiations, and to await a change in our unhappy fortunes; but this is a question which concerns not only the interests of my family, but those of many of my officers. What do you think ought to be done, Count Platen?"

"Your majesty," replied the count, bowing slightly, "my opinion is that your present position requires as much money as possible, for the means at your disposal are very limited. If then, as I believe is the case, the Prussian government sets great value upon the release of the army from its oath, much may be gained by your consent. I think your majesty cannot hesitate to engage in negotiations; nevertheless, the oath of fealty must not be released until a favourable result is gained."

"Above all things," said the crown prince, "our family domains and the hunting grounds must be preserved."

"And what do you think?" said the king, turning his head towards Meding, with marked attention.

"Your majesty," he replied, "I am quite of the opinion that you must enter upon these negotiations, yet I do not share the views either of his royal highness the crown prince or of Count Platen. From what your majesty has always firmly expressed, I believe you will not accept the fate that war has brought upon Hanover, but that you will make every effort in your power to recover your rights."

"That I will," cried the king, slightly striking the table with his hand; "should my exile endure twenty or thirty years, I will never cease to struggle for my rights!"

"Your majesty is perfectly justified in this resolution," said Meding. "War has been declared against you, and no peace concluded with you. Your majesty is a recognized enemy, and you can act accordingly; but you must then expect the other side to proceed in a similar way. For us, your majesty's servants, duty is clearly defined. Since your majesty has willed to continue the struggle, all our opinions must be governed by this determination. The possession of domains in the kingdom of Hanover would make you completely dependent upon the Prussian government. Every landowner, in concluding arrangements, must recognize almost daily the authority of the present possessors of the country. All this does not accord with the attitude your majesty desires to maintain. Besides--forgive me, your majesty, but I cannot forget a maxim taught me by my great master in politics, Herr von Manteuffel----"

"A Prussian maxim," said the crown prince, laughing.

"Your royal highness," replied Meding gravely, "the maxims I learnt and followed in the Prussian service, I will never deny. From following these maxims implicitly, I have now the honour of standing beside my king in his misfortunes. Circumstances,--my love and my duty to my royal master,--may make me the enemy of the land of my birth, but deny and scoff at it I never will."

The crown prince was silent.

"You are perfectly right," cried the king energetically. "You would be no true servant to me if you denied your former masters. Well, then, Herr von Manteuffel--?"

"Herr von Manteuffel," continued Meding, "used to say, 'A good general thinks first of a retreat.' In the struggle which your majesty undertakes, I think anxiously of a retreat; and it appears to me unworthy of the Guelphs to continue to be landowners in the country where they wore the crown. An independent capital will be the basis of obtaining fresh possessions in a country which, after the loss of the throne of Hanover, opens a great and glorious future to princes of the house of Guelph--in England."

"But shall we then give up all the possessions of our family, so full of remembrances?" cried the crown prince.

"If his majesty recovers the crown of Hanover," said Meding, "he will also recover possession of the royal domains; if not, these remembrances can only be painful. I certainly believe, too," he added, "that Prussia will grant no domains without an express recognition of her sovereignty."

The king was thoughtfully silent.

"Your majesty," said Count Platen, "the remarks of Herr Meding are certainly worthy of attention. But the wish of his royal highness is also very right. We might reconcile these views, and demand a portion of your possessions in the domains--say a third part, especially in the capital."

"That would place the whole negotiation on a difficult basis, and draw it out to a tremendous length," said Meding.

"Let us seize this method of escaping from the difficulty," said the king. "What do you think, my dear Lex?"

"I am quite of Count Platen's opinion," he replied.

Meding was silent.

"You still have some idea?" said the king, turning to him.

"Your majesty," said Meding, "my second and most serious remark is upon the connection Count Platen is inclined to establish between the property and the release of the oath of fealty. Such a connection may be advantageous. I think, however, it would compromise your majesty's dignity."

The king raised his head proudly.

"You forestall me," he cried vehemently. "Never, never shall the fate of my officers, of my true and brave army, depend upon the estates of my family. I desire that the two questions should be kept completely apart, and that this should be made perfectly clear to the English government. With regard to the army," he added, after a pause, "my decision is made. I will never release the army from its oath, but I will give them permission to leave the service. I shall never blame any of my officers who are compelled by circumstances to use this permission; but I will not free those who can and will remain. I will send military commissioners to Berlin, that they may obtain the most favourable terms they can for these officers who refuse to enter the Prussian service. Draw out instructions in this spirit, gentlemen, and lay them before me. Above all things, however, avoid mixing up my private affairs with the fate of the army. It will be needful," he added, after some consideration, "to draw up a protest against the incorporation of Hanover, and to have it ready to send to all the European courts, as soon as the annexation is proclaimed. We must also draw up a plan for diligent and energetic action in the struggle for the recovery of my rights."

"I have already employed the minister of legation, Lumé de Luine, in drawing up this protest in the French language," said Count Platen. "The facts may be found in the memorial upon the Hanoverian policy already prepared. As to our activity," he continued, "it can only be exercised at present in causing internal agitations in the country, and in keeping up a sharp observation upon European politics. The only chance of regaining the crown of Hanover lies in the goodwill and support of those powers who may possibly go to war with Prussia."

"I certainly think, your majesty," said Meding, "that the plan of our future operations, though it cannot be definitely drawn up at the present moment, should be framed on larger principles, and founded on a broader basis. As to agitations in Hanover itself, they must be conducted with great prudence, lest we should urge our unhappy country to destruction, from which we should have no power to save her. The point of support appears to me to lie elsewhere. The restoration of your majesty's rights and of the crown of Hanover will only be possible if those principles which are now defeated, namely, the federative unity of Germany, and the self-government and independence of its various races, renew the war, and are victorious. This, however, can only take place if the monarchical principle joins the spirit of progress--the democracy."

"You would restore the king to the throne by democracy?" cried Count Platen.

"His majesty's restoration is only possible," replied Meding, "through the support of the true spirit of pure democracy: not of that democracy that drags everything high and noble down into the filthy mud of the masses, but that democracy which, uniting with the spirit of progress and development now abroad, elevates the people more and more, and excites their sympathy and interest in public affairs. Permit me, your majesty," he continued after a short pause, "to express myself more plainly. Simple legitimacy, however sacred and venerable to me, is no longer a power in public life, it no longer moves the feelings of the people, it no longer influences the politics of the cabinet. Monarchy, if she wishes her rule, so wise, so beneficial, sanctioned by the right of centuries, to endure through the developments of the future, must progress with the living movement around her, must espouse herself to freedom. The foundations of her right must be upon the ancient soil, established upon the granite rock, the growth of centuries; but upon this soil the fruits of freedom must ripen. Thus only can monarchy gain permanence and recognition in the future. This is the case throughout the whole world. But in Germany, in addition to the universal love of freedom, there is the love of individual government, and the desire to preserve the various races distinct. These two principles, both forcible powers, will rise against what has just taken place, as soon as the present development is fully understood. The first result of recent events will be a great diminution of freedom and individual government. If, then, a change in the present state of affairs is ever brought about, it will be caused by the spirit of the German nation revolting against the oppression of forced military centralization. If your majesty would strive successfully, you must make yourself and Hanover the incorporation of the German national principles; you must draw around you all those elements which move the nation's noblest feelings; you must fight against temporal weapons with spiritual weapons. Should a moment come when a storm assails the unfinished edifice of to-day, then must your majesty raise the national banner, and call upon the German people to fight for federative government and for freedom. Though, however, our work must be chiefly mental, it is also needful to prepare for actual war, not by agitations and demonstrations, but by careful organization. The cadres of the army must be formed and ready, the threads that guide the policy

of Europe must be carefully watched, that your majesty may choose the right moment for action, and also influence the course of events as much as possible. I am convinced that agitations and demonstrations alone would be objectless and useless, and complete devotion to the policy of any cabinet highly dangerous, for your majesty would never wish to regain your crown through the Emperor of Austria, nor Napoleon III. Perfect independence of action, both mental and material, is needful. We must endeavour to gain the sympathy of all the European cabinets, but we must be dependent on none. In independence alone lies your majesty's hope of success even should certain circumstances arise, not utterly beyond the bounds of possibility, permitting you to conclude a favourable peace with the enemy. Without independence and a firm alliance with the mental needs of the German nation, all your majesty's efforts would be vain, they would compromise your dignity, and," he added, in a low but firm voice, "you would find no organ for them."

There was a moment's silence.

"In one word," continued Meding, "your majesty must undertake the combat with weapons that are sharp and powerful, but at the same time noble and dignified, that even our enemies may respect us; then even should all be in vain, the house of Guelph after the records of a thousand years may have this inscribed in history:--They fell, they did not sink. I have only sketched out the outlines of what I conceive should be the course of our future work. I must, however, state I am ready to recall anything at your majesty's command."

"Such a work would cost a great deal of money," said the crown prince.

"A great deal may be done with moderate means, your royal highness," replied Meding, "as I know by experience; nevertheless, when we play for crowns, we must not narrowly count the stakes."

The king raised his head.

"I quite agree with you, my dear Meding," he said, "that legitimate right should unite with freedom, with real and wholesome freedom; I truly do not fear the influence of the mind, and it shall not fail either my work, or my will. We will speak of these things again, I desire to consider them more closely."

"It would certainly be advantageous to enter into relations with the leaders of the people," said Count Platen, "and Herr Meding might enter into negotiations of a personal nature: your majesty should retain the power of disavowing them if needful."

Meding replied with some animation:

"When negotiations are carried on between two governments every diplomatist must be prepared beforehand to have his proposals disavowed under certain conditions, but should I negotiate with the people, at the first disavowal, my honour and convictions would impel me to take their side, and make their cause my own. But," he said, turning to the king, with a bow, "I know that this would never occur in your majesty's service."

The king drew out his repeater.

"It is time to dine," he said, "all the gentlemen will have arrived already. Prepare the instructions, and we will then form our plan of action."

He rose. All present also stood up. Count Platen, Lex, and Meding left the cabinet and returned to the Chinese salon.

Here the king's guests had already assembled. Besides the equerries on duty, Field-Marshal von Rorschach, Prince Hermann von Solms and Captain von Düring were present.

Count Wedel had resumed his duties and carried the chamberlain's staff.

Baron Reischach was talking to Prince Hermann.

"How proud our good prince is," he said goodnaturedly, "at having smelt powder for the first time! Yes, yes," he said, with a sigh, "those were happy days, they will never return,--an old cripple like myself will never again hear the cannon's music."

"But to look at you," said the prince, "so fresh, so rosy, one can hardly believe those times were long ago, were it not for the white hair we should take you for a young man."

"The ladies of Vienna call my head a sugared strawberry," said the general, laughing, "but the fruit tempts them no longer, the days of war and love are over for me, but my old heart keeps young, and rejoices that my dear young prince should have fought so bravely."

And the old general patted the prince on the shoulder.

Count Platen entered and greeted General von Reischach.

"What news do you bring us from Vienna?"

"Very little," said the general, shrugging his shoulders, "yet stay, a half countryman of yours, a native of Mecklenburg, is about to carry off one of our fairest young ladies."

"Whom?" asked Count Platen.

"Baron Stielow will marry the young Countess Frankenstein in a fortnight."

"Ah!" said Count Platen, "Herr von Stielow, one of Gablenz's staff?"

"The same."

"He is converted, I hear," said Prince Hermann.

"Through love of his bride," replied the general, "and from gratitude for her recovery from a severe illness; she was hurt in nursing the wounded, and suffered from poisoning of the blood. They will travel for some time after the wedding."

The dining-room doors were thrown open.

Count Wedel entered the king's cabinet.

Immediately both the folding doors were opened, Count Wedel raised his staff, the king appeared in the colonel's uniform of his Austrian regiment, the star of the Order of St. Stephen upon his breast, the cross of Maria Theresa around his neck. He leant on the arm of the crown prince.

He greeted his guests by a slight inclination of the head, and entered the dining-room. They all followed him.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

BLECHOW.

Lieutenant von Wendenstein slowly recovered after the crisis was happily passed; and though at times he suffered from great weakness there was no serious drawback in his convalescence, and the physician gave his friends good hopes that his health in the future would not be impaired.

But no sooner did he really progress, no sooner did his strength really return, his eyes grow bright, and a slight colour tinge his cheek, than Helena withdrew from her office of nurse, and left the care of the invalid entirely to the charge of Madame von Wendenstein and his sister, whilst she bestowed all her attentions upon the old lady, as if anxious lest she should miss any of her home comforts.

It was very unnecessary, for Madame von Wendenstein wanted nothing more than the sight of her son's improvement day by day.

With beaming eyes and radiant smile she watched the progress of his recovery, and with the quick perceptions of a mother's love she noted every shade of colour and of expression on the face of her son betokening the return of life and youthful strength.

She grew lively and cheerful, and showed much interest in the arrangements of the Lohmeier household; she had often expressed her surprise and great satisfaction at the orderly way in which everything was arranged; at the beautiful house linen, the excellent cooking, and the order in the house work, and she was amazed that so young a girl as Margaret should be so good a manager. She had kindly bestowed the rich treasures of her experience upon her young hostess, for whom she felt great affection, and old Lohmeier regarded this distinguished lady, who yet was so well acquainted with all household details, with the greatest veneration, especially when he saw the interest his daughter, the pride of his heart, had excited in her mind.

The lieutenant remarked that Helena no longer appeared at his bed-side; his eyes often rested upon her enquiringly when he was able to rise and go into his mother's room, but he said very little, he was not quite sure whether the sweet and charming picture which filled his mind was the result of a feverish imagination or the truth.

Helena was quiet and dreamy; she seldom looked at Wendenstein, the feelings she had so plainly shown in the days of anguish and danger were now most carefully concealed.

Madame von Wendenstein often turned her mild eyes sympathizingly upon the young girl; but she did not say a word, for she held that every true woman's heart is a tender flower, which must

bud and blossom in its own way, shrinking back and closing at a rough touch. In her quiet pious way she had committed both these young hearts into God's hand, and she trusted that in His good time they would come to a happy understanding.

The candidate came very little. He was unwearied in consoling and exhorting the sick, and the whole town spoke of him with esteem and admiration. He said a few kind and hearty words to Lieutenant von Wendenstein when he first saw him, after his recovery appeared certain, reminding him of the gratitude he ought to feel for the life restored to him when on the threshold of death; but Wendenstein felt a strange shudder pass through him as he spoke, and he sat still afterwards for some time in deep thought, pursuing the frightful and alarming recollections which arose in his mind, but which he could not completely recall. Whenever he saw the candidate the same feeling of cold and deadly fear returned, and again his memory refused to recall the reason. He blamed himself greatly for his aversion to so excellent a man, and the more his recovery progressed and his nerves strengthened, the more he struggled to feel kindness and friendship for the young clergyman.

After some time of this quiet life, the day came when the ladies and the lieutenant, who could now walk slowly, determined to return home. Notwithstanding her joy at her son's recovery Madame von Wendenstein had a new and deep cause for grief. The incorporation of Hanover with Prussia was quite decided upon, and the president had told his wife in a short and mournful letter that he should resign, as he could not at his age change his masters. He should go to Hanover for a time, and then he would buy an estate for his son the lieutenant, as he no longer wished him to remain in the army under present circumstances. The whole family could reside with him.

This letter Madame von Wendenstein received the evening before her journey. As she read it large tears ran slowly down her cheeks. She was then to return, only to leave the old house that for so many years had sheltered her, the home filled with so many remembrances of her quiet happy life. But she was accustomed always to conform to her husband's will without questioning it, and when she thought of leaving the old house at Blechow, which after all belonged to the office the president was about to resign, and of going to an estate which would really be her son's, and of the pleasure of arranging and founding a house for him, she dried her tears. She thought of the children and grandchildren who would always live there, and a smile played round her lips as she again read the president's letter.

The lieutenant's eyes sparkled with joy.

"Oh! how I thank my father!" he cried; "how grateful I am to him for allowing me to leave the service. It would have been too painful to forget the old flag for which I shed my blood."

And holding out his hand to his mother with a smile he said--

"And how beautiful my dear mother will make our new home; oh! it will be charming!"

He gazed at Helena who sat opposite to him, bending over her work. She did not raise her eyes; but she felt his look, and a deep blush passed over her face, and Madame von Wendenstein saw it with a quiet smile; from the sorrowful present she foresaw a bright and happy future.

Whilst this went on in the apartments upstairs, Margaret sat with her father and Fritz Deyke at their simple evening meal.

The young girl turned the new potatoes skilfully out of their brown coats, they were first-fruits of the year, and she prepared them for her father and the guest who had become like one of themselves.

They were all three silent, and the young peasant looked very mournful.

"You do not eat," said the old man, looking at his guest's plate, though he himself showed but little appetite.

"Perhaps I have not done them well," said Margaret, trying to make a little joke; but her voice was dismal.

Fritz Deyke gave a quick glance at her pale face and downcast eyes.

"I cannot!" he cried, as he threw down his knife and fork upon the plate. "When I think that I am to go to-morrow, I really wish I had never come; when I sit at home and think of how happy we used to be, especially how beautifully Margaret did everything at dinner time--no wonder I cannot eat!"

Old Lohmeier looked at him sympathetically, it was plain that he was sorry to part with the kind, goodhearted young fellow.

"Stay here," he said simply, "you know we should like to keep you."

Margaret looked at him with bright eyes swimming with tears.

"I cannot help it," he said, "I must go some time, and the longer I stay the worse it will be."

He sighed deeply, and his eyes met those of the young girl.

Margaret put down her head and sobbed aloud. Then she sprang up, covered her face with her hands, and leaned her head against a large chest that stood in the corner, weeping bitterly.

Fritz Deyke rushed to her.

"My God!" he cried, and tried to withdraw her hands from her face, "I cannot bear it, you will break my heart!"

He stood still for a moment before the weeping girl with his eyes fixed thoughtfully upon the ground. Then he walked quickly back to the table and stood before the old man.

"Herr Lohmeier," he said in a firm tone, "I can no longer restrain my feelings. I intended to go home first and come to an understanding with my father, and then to come back here, but I cannot do it. I cannot see her cry, I must speak, and as to my father, I know beforehand quite well what he will say. Herr Lohmeier, I cannot be happy without Margaret, I have enough, much more than enough to keep a wife. I know you think me an honest fellow--give me your daughter!"

Margaret did not move, she kept her hands over her face, the low sound of her weeping was heard throughout the room, whilst Fritz Deyke looked at her father in breathless suspense.

He gazed gravely before him. He did not look much surprised, perhaps he had expected something of the kind, but for a time he was silent and thoughtful.

"It is all right as far as I am concerned," he said at last, "I have grown very fond of you, and I can trust my daughter's happiness to you, but there are two persons to ask about it--in the first place, my daughter."

With one bound Fritz was by Margaret's side.

"Margaret," he cried, "will you go with me?" And putting his arm round her, he drew her gently to the table opposite to her father.

She let her hands glide down from her face; her eyes were full of tears, but they beamed with affection and confidence, and whilst she gazed at her young lover, she said in a loud firm voice:

"Yes!"

"Well, that is one person," said old Lohmeier, laughing, "but the consent of the second is a graver matter, I mean your father. These are sad times, and your father, a thorough-going Hanoverian, will scarcely welcome a Prussian daughter-in-law to his house; she is the daughter of a stiff true Prussian, and I would disinherit her if she ever forgot the love she owes her king."

Fritz Deyke was silent for a moment.

"Herr Lohmeier," he then said, "you know I am a Hanoverian with all my heart and soul, and that it is a great grief to me that we are now to be Prussian, but what can I do, or how can Margaret help it? We did not make the politics and we can't change them; would to God Prussia and Hanover could come to as good an understanding as we have done. However," he added more warmly, "I cannot complain, for if Prussia takes my country at least it gives me the best thing it has, and my annexation is a peaceful one, of heart to heart."

He embraced Margaret, and looked imploringly at the old man.

But he continued grave and thoughtful--

"Will your father think so?" he asked.

Fritz considered a moment, then he cried suddenly,

"Wait a moment!" and rushed from the room.

Lohmeier looked after him with surprise. "Where is he going?" he asked.

"I think I know," said Margaret; "he has often told me what a great respect his father has for Madame von Wendenstein, and how he will do anything at a word from her."

Fritz soon came back.

"Madame von Wendenstein begs you to go to her," said he to old Lohmeier with a look of delight.

He stood up at once, brushed his sleeve with the tips of his fingers, stroked his grey hair with the palm of his hand and went upstairs.

Fritz and Margaret remained alone.

He seated himself and gently drew the young girl into a chair beside him.

What did they say? So little and yet so much, their speech was so old and yet so new, one more variation on the eternal melody of love, that rings in the human heart from the cradle to the grave, and whose endearing tones pass with the soul into the great harmony of Eternity.

Madame von Wendenstein led old Lohmeier into her son's sick room, and there they remained together for half an hour, and the result of their conversation was, that he consented to his daughter's betrothal to Fritz, upon condition that old Deyke's approval was gained; and that he might learn to know his future daughter-in-law, Madame von Wendenstein invited Margaret to go home with her. She undertook to introduce her lover's father to her, and to instruct her in the house-keeping arrangements of her own country. Old Lohmeier accepted the invitation with much pride, for his veneration for this lady who had passed many weeks in his house, was immense. He informed the young people with great dignity and importance, "that he had talked the matter over with his much honoured friend Madame von Wendenstein," and they both felt extremely happy, though Margaret was rather alarmed at the prospect of meeting with the stern old Bauermeister, of whom Fritz always spoke in terms of the greatest respect.

Thus their departure drew near. Some time before, Madame von Wendenstein had endeavoured to propose some remuneration for all the trouble and expense her son's illness had occasioned, but it had been so decidedly refused by the old brewer, and he had appeared so hurt at the proposal, that she had never again renewed it. On the day of her departure she gave Margaret a beautiful cross of rubies and diamonds, on a string of large pearls.

"I have wept many tears here," she said gently. "Let the pearls remind you of this, my child; but the sacred love we adore in the Cross, the sign of the Holy Passion and of our redemption, has dried my tears, and raised and comforted my heart. Let the cross remind you of this; and if you, too, shed tears of grief, look at this cross, with firm faith and loving resignation."

Tears were in Margaret's eyes as she received the cross; and old Lohmeier took Madame von Wendenstein's fine white hand in his own with emotion, and pressed his lips upon it. He carefully locked up the pearl necklace and the cross in an old oaken chest, in which he kept the simple but massive ornaments of his late wife; they were all to be Margaret's when she married, and entered the large old farmhouse as its mistress.

And then they set out, accompanied by a thousand good wishes from old Lohmeier, who promised, when all was arranged, to think of retiring from his business, and of spending the last years of his life quietly near his daughter's new home.

Thus in the spot where so bloody a battle had raged between Hanover and Prussia, Christian compassion had caused two young hearts to reap a harvest of love from the seeds of hatred. Thus was the will of the Eternal accomplished, who turns evil into good; and where demons have led men into strife and hatred, His unwearied care removes their gloomy traces by that bright child of heaven--Reconciliation.

Their return to Blechow was grave and sad. The president silently strained to his breast the son restored to him from the gates of death; silently, too, he kissed the brow of his wife. The days that followed were calm and melancholy.

The president worked hard with Auditor von Bergfeld, that he might leave everything in the most perfect order for his successor. Madame von Wendenstein went quietly about the house, occupied in the melancholy task of displacing the treasures collected during more than twenty years of house-keeping, and the remembrances they awakened were known only to her eye and her heart. All those treasures had to be packed in huge coffers, and conveyed to the new house. And the enormous oaken chests looked so sad, with their opened doors and their empty trays, and throughout the house sighed the gloomy spirit of departure and separation, the spirit that moves through human life like a messenger of death, touching the heart with a shrinking foreboding of the last great farewell of eternity. Every farewell breaks a flower from the wreath adorning the spring-time of our lives, until the last blooms are buried beneath the wintry snows of death. But every blossom leaves a fruit behind, whose seed is in itself; and these will bear purer, fairer flowers, and spring up into imperishable beauty beneath the life-breath of eternal spring.

Fritz Deyke had a long conversation with his father, who looked very black at first, when he heard what his son had to say. He loved his son, he had unbounded confidence in him, and he knew he would make no unworthy choice; but to have a town young lady for his daughter-in-law, to have a Prussian mistress in Hanoverian Wendland was not at all to his mind. But he said nothing, and, at his son's request, he went to the castle to see Madame von Wendenstein.

The old lady he had always regarded as a model of womanly perfection, and she told him of all the attention and kindness her son had received in old Lohmeier's house, taking care to describe the excellent burgher position held by Margaret's father. Then she kindly and warmly urged him not to visit the misfortunes of the times upon innocent heads; and he held out his hand to her, and said,--

"It shall be as my son wishes. He is good and true: the wife he brings to my house shall be welcome, and my blessing shall rest upon her."

Then Madame von Wendenstein opened the door into the next room, and Margaret, blushing deeply, and trembling from agitation, entered; but her eyes were bright and candid. She was dressed in the costume of the rich peasant women of Wendland. She went up quickly to the old man, and kissed his hand, and a warm tear fell upon the hand hardened with toil.

A gentle smile passed over the stern, furrowed face of the old peasant; his eyes looked milder than they had done for many a day, as he gazed down upon the young girl's strong, yet slender form. He stroked her glossy hair, and said, in a low voice,--

"God bless you, my daughter!"

Then everything was said, and everything was settled. Old Deyke was a man of few words; but his words were like a rock--you might have built a house upon them when they were spoken.

He took Margaret to his farm, and as she walked at his side, and told him artlessly how amazed she had been at the wonderful treasures of the old castle, and as she let a word fall showing every now and then, how much she knew about housekeeping, his face grew brighter and brighter. But when she sent the maidservants out of the kitchen, and lighted the fire, and cooked the dinner herself with skilful hands; when she laid the cloth, arranging everything so quickly and prettily, whilst Fritz watched her with delighted eyes; when at last she brought the old man's pipe, and lighted it for him, and then looked up at him with loving, imploring eyes, he looked at her through tears: the image of his dead wife rose before him, and he held out his hand to his son, saying,--

"I thank you for bringing me such a daughter."

The young people knelt down before him, and he said, in a low half choking voice:

"God bless and keep you, my dear, dear children!"

The lieutenant was very quiet and thoughtful. His wound was quite healed, his nerves were grown strong again, and the wonderful reparatory powers of youth sent his blood through his veins as quickly as before. He seldom saw Helena: when she came up from the Vicarage she was surrounded by the others, and he could only exchange a few words with her. The old merry confidence between the two friends from childhood would not return; there was something new and strange between them, which closed their lips when it sought expression in words.

One afternoon, when the president was hard at work with Auditor von Bergfeld, and Madame von Wendenstein, her daughters and Margaret were busy in the melancholy occupation of dismantling the house, the lieutenant walked slowly and thoughtfully towards the pastor's.

The roses had withered in the pretty little garden, and the autumnal asters raised their many-coloured heads, overtopped by the tall and brilliant sunflowers.

Helena sat at the open window, and often raised her eyes from her work to look dreamily over the cornfields; her father and the candidate had gone out to make some visits in the village; she was alone with her thoughts.

Suddenly she trembled slightly, a blush spread hastily over her delicate face, she let her work fall into her lap; Lieutenant von Wendenstein had entered the garden, and was approaching the house.

A moment later he knocked at the door of the sitting-room; she made an effort to cry "Come in," and he entered.

He looked delighted when he saw that Helena was alone.

He came to her quickly and took her hand.

"My father is out," she said, with downcast eyes and trembling voice, "will you take a chair?"

The lieutenant remained standing before her, and looked at her long and affectionately. Then he raised her hand to his lips and pressed a kiss upon it.

Blushing deeply, she tried to draw her hand away; he held it with gentle force.

"I am so very glad to find you alone," he said; "I have wanted so long to ask you something I am not quite sure about."

She raised her eyes to his with surprise and enquiry, she wished to speak, but she found no words.

"Helena," he said, in a low voice, "when I was wounded and ill in Langensalza, without strength enough to think clearly, dizzy with fever, a sweet image was always before me,--I saw a consoling angel looking at me so kindly, so lovingly,--I held her helping hand in mine, I pressed it to my lips, and from the depths of my heart I said, 'dear Helena.'"

She withdrew her hand quickly, and seated herself on the chair near the window; pale and

trembling, her eyes sought the ground.

He went up to her and continued in urgent terms:

"Tell me,--for sometimes a gloomy veil comes over my memory,--tell me, this image that never leaves my heart, that follows me everywhere--was it real?"

She gave no answer, but sat still and motionless.

"Helena," he said imploringly, "I saw eyes that told me such good and loving things in a mute language,--those eyes are near me night and day. Helena, look at me once more, that I may see whether the image in my heart was the dream of fever, or the truth."

He sank on his knees before her, and seized her hand as it hung beside her, looking up at her with an earnest loving gaze.

Then she slowly raised her eyes, and in her eyes lay her answer; those eyes again spoke the mute language that found an echo in his heart. Again he pressed her hand to his lips, and again she permitted it with a loving smile, and in a soft voice, happy and triumphant, he whispered, "Dear, dear Helena!"

They sat for a long time in silence; he was never weary of gazing on the beloved features which in the days of his deadly peril were graven so deeply in his soul.

Then he sprang up, bent over her and held her in his arms.

The door opened, the pastor and candidate entered.

The old gentleman looked much surprised at this unexpected scene, an evil flash of hatred darted from the candidate's sharp eyes, but he quickly fixed them on the ground and an oily smile played around his mouth.

Helena bent down her head in charming confusion. The lieutenant hastened to the pastor and seized his hand energetically.

"Dear sir," he said, in a decided voice, "my dear playmate, Helena, watched over my life, and saved it when it hung on the feeblest thread,--I have implored her to watch over it henceforth,--for ever,--and--she will." He looked at the young girl with eyes full of happiness and continued, "Will you unite our hands before the altar of our dear old church, where we made our vows at our confirmation?"

And he looked the old clergyman honestly in the face.

He was still lost in astonishment at the turn affairs had taken, and which he had never perceived.

He looked at his daughter. Her deep blushes, and the bashful, yet imploring expression of her eyes, convinced him that God had joined two hearts together, and that it would ill beseem him to part them. He loved von Wendenstein, and could only rejoice at the prospect of being more closely connected with him; but his intentions and plans for his daughter had been so different, he could not accommodate himself at once to the change.

Helena sprang to her feet, she hurried to her father and threw herself upon his breast.

The old gentleman looked gravely at his nephew, he stood with downcast eyes, and gentle smiles.

"My dear Herr von Wendenstein," said the pastor, "you well know the great esteem I have ever entertained for you and your family, and if my daughter has given you her heart, as a father and as a priest I must lay my hand upon your heads and bless you. I must own, however, that all this has greatly surprised me. I had quite different ideas as to my daughter's future life," and he again looked enquiringly at the candidate.

But he came up to the pastor, and said in a calm voice, though without raising his eyes:

"Let there be no discord in the friendly harmony of this hour, my dear uncle. You know I am devoted above all things to my sacred calling; earthly wishes, however dear to my heart, cannot disturb the spiritual calm of my soul, and if heaven has decreed that my hopes and desires are to be denied, I shall only see a gracious dispensation of Providence, intended to turn away my soul from earthly things, that all its powers may be devoted to the accomplishment of my sacred office. I shall pray for my cousin's happiness with my whole soul! I congratulate you most heartily, Herr von Wendenstein," he added, holding out his hand to the young officer. He seized it and looked at the young clergyman with emotion. But the hand was cold as ice, and a deep shudder passed through his nerves, as he felt its smooth serpent-like pressure.

The last time that all the family friends assembled around the hospitable board of the old Castle of Blechow, was at the celebration of the lieutenant's betrothal with Helena. The president had thus willed it, and he also insisted that old Deyke, Fritz, and Margaret, as well as Lohmeier,

who was with them, should take part in the family festivity, which was also a day of farewell. The president wished to make a sad farewell less melancholy, by thus solemnizing the union of two hearts.

He wished that all should carry away a happy recollection of their last day at Blechow, and that the last rays of the old times should sink brightly into the ocean of the past.

Everything was packed up, and ready to start; only the dinner service and the heavy old plate was still used, and displayed its glories for the last time.

The president's eldest son had arrived early in the morning, and had had a long and serious conversation with his father.

He told him he had been offered the assistant-secretaryship in the Ministry of the Interior in Berlin, and he expressed a wish to accept the appointment, since he hoped by this means to alleviate the condition of his native country, under its new circumstances. Yet he left the decision entirely to his father.

The president stood for a long time in grave thought

"You are young, my son," he said, at last, in a gentle voice; "your life belongs to the future--you must go forth and work in the present--you ought not to bury yourself in the past. The king has released all his civil servants from their oath; you are therefore free,--seize the opportunity of making a career for yourself, and of labouring for the general good. But never forget that good and faithful Hanover is your fatherland,--keep that remembrance sacredly in your heart, and when you can, work that it may be treated lovingly, for the sake of it; fair and honourable history in the past. My blessing be upon you in your new path!"

The son kissed his father's hand in silence, and nothing more was said by either of them on the subject.

The guests sat around the table in the dining-room of the old castle with grave emotion. Old Deyke took his place beside the president with great dignity. Fritz and Margaret sat beside each other embarrassed, but happy,--the lieutenant's eyes sparkled with joy. Helena's fair face expressed thoughtful happiness; and though a tear sometimes shone in Madame von Wendenstein's soft eyes, when she looked at her son and his lovely bride, such a happy smile came to her lips, that it was hard to say whether the pearly drop came from the bitter cup of grief or the pure spring of joy.

"Do you remember, dearest Helena," said the lieutenant, "how you showed me the dark cloud, which was driven away from the silver beams of the moon? You see it has returned, and now rests in its pure, full light; but it brings no storm, no tempest, but blessing and happiness to the garden of our lives!"

She looked at him with her loving eyes, smilingly.

"I think," she whispered, "you have found the magic key of the kingdom of dreams and fancies, which you once thought you could only have from my hands."

"And did I not have it from your hands?" he said; "you gave it to me when I was on the borders of death, and I will guard it truly in the golden light of life!"

The dessert was brought. A post-horn was heard.

The old servant in a few minutes announced Baron von Klentzin.

"The successor to your office in Blechow, my dear father," said the assessor; "the civil commissioner von Hardenberg has desired him to release you."

They all rose gravely.

The Prussian entered; he was a tall, slender young man, elegant in his appearance, graceful in his movements.

The president advanced towards him with calm dignity.

"You are welcome, Baron von Klentzin, to my house,--the house that is still mine, and that to-morrow will be yours. We are celebrating a family festivity,--the betrothal of my son,--and I beg you will join us."

He introduced the young man to his wife, and to the others, and then requested him to be seated beside Madame von Wendenstein. He signed to the servant to fill his guest's glass with champagne.

"To-morrow I shall resign my office to you, and I hope you will find everything in order," said the old gentleman,--"to-day allow me to treat you as my guest."

Baron von Klentzin bowed.

"I enter your circle as a stranger," he said, "and I feel I can scarcely be welcome. But I beg you, sir, and all here present, to believe that I deeply respect your feelings,--we know what love to the Fatherland is,--and," he added warmly, "we come to you with open hands and hearts. May the future unite us all, without grief or bitterness, in one glorious Germany! Now, permit me to empty my glass to the happiness of the youthful pair!"

"Sir," said the president, with deep melancholy in his voice, "it has ever been the unalterable custom at my table to drink to the health of our king and commander-in-chief. He is no longer sovereign of this country. You will understand how I wish this last day not to deviate from the old custom of my house. A new time arises, but let us think of the old with thankfulness and love!"

Baron von Klentzin seized his glass.

"Only from love of the past can bloom a blessing on the future," he said feelingly; "and far be it from me to prevent, by my presence, the last farewell to such a past."

They all rose.

The president said, solemnly--

"'The King!' who was our lord, and to whom the service of my life belongs. May God's blessing be upon him!"

They all repeated the toast.

Herr von Klentzin, deeply moved, touched his glass against his host's, and the slight sound reverberated through the room.

They all emptied their glasses silently.

That was the last toast to George V. in the old castle of Blechow. Klentzin looked down thoughtfully.

"We have won a fair country," he said to himself; "God grant that we may win these hearts to true brotherhood."

CHAPTER XXIX.

"GOD AND THE FATHERLAND!"

King William had returned to Berlin. The nation received him with the wildest joy, scarcely knowing how to express its delight and enthusiasm at this unparalleled seven days' campaign, the wonderful success of which had placed Prussia so high amongst the first-class powers of Europe, and had so completely consolidated the unity of Germany. The first wild burst of delight was over in Berlin. Everything began to return to its accustomed course, at least outwardly, for every heart still swelled high with the proud feeling of victory.

Early one morning King William entered his cabinet. He was dressed, as always, in uniform, with the iron cross and the Order of Merit.

"Is Schneider here?" he enquired of the attendant on duty.

"At your majesty's command. He waits in the anteroom."

At a sign from the king, Louis Schneider entered, with a large portfolio under his arm.

"Good morning, Schneider," cried the king. "Everything has returned to its accustomed order, and we can begin regular work. What is there in the way of literature? What have you got in that great portfolio?"

"Allow me first, your majesty, to offer you my most hearty congratulations on the successful termination of the war. Here, on the very spot," said Schneider, with emotion, "where I stood last time--that day when your majesty regarded the future so anxiously, and found yourself so completely without allies,--your majesty has again experienced that the King of Prussia is not weak when he stands alone!"

"If he has those two Allies who gave us our device," said the king, with a calm smile, "God and the Fatherland!"

He was silent for a moment. Schneider opened his portfolio.

"Well, what have you in the newspapers?" asked the king.

"Nothing, your majesty, but variations upon one theme--joy at our victories, gratitude to our royal conqueror, his soldiers, and his ministers. The whole press is one great dithyrambus, expressing its emotions now majestically, now pathetically, now comically. But good advice to Prussia and the North-German Confederacy is not wanting. It is incredible how much didactic writing is produced on the future well-being of Germany. Would your majesty like an example?"

The king was silent, and looked thoughtfully before him.

"Schneider," he said, "how ungrateful men are!"

Schneider gazed at the king in amazement.

"Your majesty," he cried, "I cannot, alas! deny that ingratitude is a characteristic of the human race; but I thought the present time was really an exception, everyone is so anxious to express gratitude to your majesty, to the generals."

"It is just at the present time," said the king gravely, "that I think the world, and Berlin especially, so very ungrateful. They thank me, in the most exaggerated words, my Fritz too, all my generals; but *One* Man they forget, and yet that man had a great share in the success that God has given us."

Schneider still looked at the king enquiringly.

"No one thinks of my brother, the late king," said King William, in a voice that trembled slightly.

Deep emotion appeared on Schneider's animated face, a tear shone on his eyelashes.

"Yes, by God!" he cried, in his sonorous voice, "your majesty is right; we are ungrateful."

"How deep, how true," said the king, "was his devotion to Germany's greatness, and to Prussia's destiny; how much he did to strengthen the army, and to organize the government of Prussia, that she might be ready to fulfil her high calling. Prussia's future greatness was clear to his enlightened mind; and if the rough hand of revolution had not interfered in the carrying-out of his plans and views----"

The king paused suddenly, and pursued his thoughts in silence.

Schneider's eyes rested with warm affection upon the thoughtful features of his generous and simple-minded sovereign.

"If God has granted to us to pluck the fruit," continued the king, "yet ought we not to forget whose careful hand planted the tree and watered its roots in time of drought; truly he has not deserved it of us."

The king turned to his writing-table, and took up a sheet of paper.

"I have written down a few of my thoughts," said he with some hesitation, "but chiefly facts, as to what the late king did for Prussia, how he strengthened the army, and the nation, and laboured for the unity of Germany. I should like a leading article to be written from this and published in the 'Spener Gazette,' that all Berlin may read it. Will you see to this?"

He held out the paper to Schneider, who took it respectfully, his eyes resting on the king's face with admiration and surprise.

"I will attend to it at once,--does your majesty wish for an especial title?"

"It must be made rather striking," said the king, "that every one may read it. Let it be called 'A Royal Brother,'" he added after a moment's thought; "if all forget him, his brother must not forget him."

"I will carry out your majesty's wishes at once," said Schneider, "and," he added with much emotion, "I shall henceforth look upon what has passed to-day as the most beautiful incident of my life. The victor of Königgrätz amidst the rejoicing of his people places half his laurels on his brother's grave."

"It hurts me to find how little they thought of my brother in their rejoicings," said the king, with a gentle smile, "for I have only built upon the foundation he laid. Now go, and take care that the article appears shortly, we will do nothing else to-day. This you will do with your whole heart. I know your faithfulness to your late king."

He offered his hand to Schneider, but would not permit him to press it to his lips.

The king turned away and walked silently to his writing-table, and in silence Schneider left the

cabinet.

Count Bismarck too had returned, and was devoting himself with resistless energy to the work before him of organizing and arranging the new state of affairs.

Late one evening the count again sat in his cabinet before his large writing-table, piled with papers, busily occupied in reading despatches, and in thinking over what was laid before him. There was a sharp knock at the door leading from the ante-room.

The count looked up. His confidant only would come in that manner.

"Come in!" he exclaimed. Baron von Keudell entered. The minister nodded to him with a smile.

"What brings you here, dear Keudell?" he asked, laying aside a paper which he had just looked through, "has anything happened?"

"Something decidedly strange has happened, your excellency, which I must at once impart to you. Monsieur Hansen is here, and has just been with me."

"Hansen, the Danish agitator?" asked Bismarck.

"The same," said Keudell, "only this time he is not the Danish agitator, but the French agent."

A cloud gathered on Count Bismarck's brow.

"What do they still want in Paris?" he cried. "Are they not yet satisfied? Benedetti must have understood me perfectly."

"I think they wish to make one more secret effort," said von Keudell. "I beg you to hear Monsieur Hansen yourself, he is to a certain extent accredited by Drouyn de Lhuys, and he can really tell us much that it interests us to know."

"Drouyn de Lhuys is no longer minister," said Count Bismarck.

"He has resigned, certainly," replied Keudell, "and Lavalette is in his place until Moustier arrives, but his credentials prove that Hansen has something to propose, which is not to follow the usual course of diplomacy until it is known how we shall receive it."

"Well," said Bismarck, after a short pause, "why should I not hear him? My mind, though, is made up as to all these proposals, direct or indirect. Where is Monsieur Hansen?"

"I brought him with me; he is waiting down stairs, and if your excellency desires----"

"Be so kind as to bring him here," said the minister; "I shall find you when I join the countess?"

Keudell bowed, a minute afterwards he took Monsieur Hansen to the cabinet and withdrew as soon as Bismarck had received the unimportant-looking little man with great cordiality, and had requested him to be seated at his writing-table.

The count's keen grey eyes rested enquiringly on the clever face of the Dane.

"Your excellency," said Hansen, "I thank you in the name of my country for your generosity to Denmark, after your complete success, expressed in Article V. of the peace stipulations."

Count Bismarck bowed slightly.

"I have nothing against Denmark," he said; "on the contrary I esteem and respect that sturdy little nation, and I heartily wish Prussia and Denmark to live together on friendly terms. I rely upon your countrymen not to throw difficulties in the practical fulfilment of the principles which must guide us in regard to Denmark."

"I wish to be of use to your excellency," said Hansen. "I have come to impart my ideas upon the delicate relations existing between newly constituted Germany and France."

Count Bismarck made a slight movement intimating that he was willing to listen.

"I ought to impart to your excellency that I have been initiated into the negociations that have already taken place."

Bismarck remained silent.

"The emperor," continued Hansen, "is in a very painful position. He has the greatest repugnance to interrupting in any way the right of a great people to national development, by being inimical to the great events just accomplished in Germany."

A scarcely perceptible smile passed over the minister's grave face.

"On the other hand," added Hansen, "it is impossible to deny that the great increase in the political and military strength of Prussia, has greatly troubled public opinion in France. Napoleon

is less able to neglect public opinion than any other sovereign in Europe, since his government is based on the free will of the people, and founded on the votes of public opinion in France. At one time," said he as Bismarck still looked at him calmly and remained silent, "the emperor believed France would be satisfied by compensations which would increase her defensive power, and form some balance to the great additions in the offensive strength of Germany. He is, however, very unwilling to urge this question in any way that can disturb or endanger the present friendship between France and Germany."

Again a slight smile passed over Bismarck's face.

"The emperor," pursued Hansen, "thinks there is a way which might for ever prevent disagreement. It is founded on the principle that friction can best be prevented between two powerful military nations, not by fortified frontiers, but by neutral territory. His idea is to form a state in imitation of Belgium upon the Rhine, as an excellent means of maintaining peaceful relations between France and Germany. The King of Saxony would appear to be a suitable head to this Roman Catholic country."

"Peace is concluded with Saxony," said Count Bismarck.

"And I did not intend to suggest this idea," replied Hansen; "it would be better on many accounts to bestow this kingdom of the Rhine upon the Prince of Hohenzollern, and thus to found a dynasty whose connection with the Prussian royal family would prevent any mistrust in Germany."

"The princes of Hohenzollern are not related to our royal family," said Count Bismarck.

"They are a branch of the same family," replied Monsieur Hansen. "I believe I may assure your excellency that if this suggestion meets with your approval, the affair may quickly be arranged in the usual diplomatic way."

He was silent.

For a moment Count Bismarck looked down thoughtfully, then he raised his eyes, and fixing them calmly on Hanson's expectant face, he said in a firm voice:

"I will not ask who has empowered you to make this proposal. I shall regard this idea as your private and personal notion, and in return I will plainly and candidly express my own opinion on the subject. Germany, by her success in a great war, has made a vast step forwards in her national constitution. The German nation is not obliged to account for this to any one, she need not trouble herself as to whether other nations are pleased or displeased by the exercise of her national rights, but above all she is not called upon to pay a bribe to any other country, and thus to purchase the Unity of Germany. As long as I am the Prussian minister, as long as I influence the fate of Germany," he cried, "such a bribe shall not be paid, under whatever form it may be disguised! That is my private opinion," he added, "you thus see it would be quite superfluous to express the ideas you proposed to me in any official way; the answer of the Prussian Government would be exactly the same as that I have just given you."

"Your excellency," said Monsieur Hansen, who was evidently disconcerted at the count's decided refusal to continue the discussion, "I am really grateful to you for the regard you have shown to the national feeling's of Denmark, and I honestly desire to do you a service in this matter. I wish you to understand," he continued gravely, "that from what I know of the state of affairs, and the popular displeasure in Paris, war will sooner or later be unavoidable, if this last basis of a favourable understanding with France is refused. I may affirm, with the fullest conviction, war can then be only a question of time."

Count Bismarck stood up, his eyes flashed proudly.

"Then let war come," he cried firmly; "I fear it not, and never will I avoid it by sacrificing the honour of Germany! The valiant armies of Prussia and of her allies, who smote Austria, will take the field against France with far greater enthusiasm, if we are forced to do so. You may tell that to anyone who is interested in knowing my views; but you may also add, that no one prizes more highly than I do the good understanding between France and Germany. The French and German nations are formed rather to progress hand in hand, than to wrestle with each other in deadly strife. I will do all in my power to maintain peace and friendship,--all, except sacrificing the honour and dignity of Germany."

"I beg your excellency at least to believe that I have been actuated only by the purest motives, in making a proposal I believed conducive to the interests of both nations."

"I thank you for it," said Bismarck politely; "it has served to clear up the situation perfectly."

Monsieur Hansen left the cabinet with a low bow.

"He would play the same game with Germany that he did with Italy," cried the count as soon as he was alone; "but from me he shall gain neither a Savoy nor a Nice!"

He left his cabinet, and repaired to his wife's drawing-room.

The ladies with Baron von Keudell sat around the tea-table.

The count entered, and greeted them affectionately.

"Have you seen the new 'Kladderadatsch?'" asked the countess, pointing to the well-known comic face upon a newspaper that lay on the table.

The count seized it, and turned to the large picture on the last page.

It represented an infirm old beggar, with the features of the Emperor Napoleon, standing before the door of a house, hat in hand, asking an alms. A window was open, and the minister-president was represented looking from it with a movement of refusal, and beneath was printed, "Nothing given away here."

With a merry laugh, the count threw the paper on the table.

"It is strange," he said, "how cleverly they often describe the situation by a drawing. There is more told in this picture than in many a long leading article."

At one draught he emptied the crystal goblet of foaming beer which was handed to him.

"I must ask you a favour, Keudell," he said gravely: "will you play me that Funeral March of Beethoven. You remember it. You played it one evening before the war."

Keudell rose with alacrity, and seated himself at the piano.

Again the impressive chords of the mighty Hymn of Death arose,--the ladies listened breathlessly.

Count Bismarck drew himself to his full height; his grave, strongly-marked features shone with enthusiasm.

He drew a deep breath as Herr von Keudell ended.

"Many heroes have fallen," he said, in a deep voice, "but the prize is won,--their blood has not flowed in vain. Time has brought many sorrows,--discords will still echo in the future. May the Almighty resolve them into the glorious harmony of a great United Germany!"

His voice swelled through the room,--the countess looked at him with tearful eyes. Solemnly, and as if involuntarily, Keudell raised his hands, and let them sink upon the keys. Then that War-cry of the Faith arose, in the glorious tones in which the great Reformer expressed his rooted confidence in the God of Battles.

Count Bismarck raised his eyes upwards, a look of happiness passed over his excited features, and, following the melody, his lips whispered softly--

> "Ein' feste Burg ist unser Gott,
> Ein' starke Wehr und Waffen!"

FOOTNOTES:

Footnote 1: Where the rifle-club holds its meetings.

Footnote 2: The King of Saxony remained true to Napoleon, although part of the Saxon troops went over to the Allies during the battle of Leipsic.

THE END.

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