

CHAPTER I

In October, 1805, a Russian army was occupying the villages and towns of the Archduchy of Austria, and yet other regiments freshly arriving from Russia were settling near the fortress of Braunau and burdening the inhabitants on whom they were quartered. Braunau was the headquarters of the commander in chief, Kutúzov.

On October 11, 1805, one of the infantry regiments that had just reached Braunau had halted half a mile from the town, waiting to be inspected by the commander in chief. Despite the un-Russian appearance of the locality and surroundings—fruit gardens, stone fences, tiled roofs, and hills in the distance—and despite the fact that the inhabitants (who gazed with curiosity at the soldiers) were not Russians, the regiment had just the appearance of any Russian regiment preparing for an inspection anywhere in the heart of Russia.

On the evening of the last day's march an order had been received that the commander in chief would inspect the regiment on the march. Though the words of the order were not clear to the regimental commander, and the question arose whether the troops were to be in marching order or not, it was decided at a consultation between the battalion commanders to present the regiment in parade order, on the principle that it is always better to "bow too low than not bow low enough." So the soldiers, after a twenty-mile march, were kept mending and cleaning all night long without closing their eyes, while the adjutants and company commanders calculated and reckoned, and by morning the regiment—instead of the straggling, disorderly crowd it had been on its last march the day before—presented a well-ordered array of two thousand men each of whom knew his place and his duty, had every button and every strap in place, and shone with cleanliness. And not only externally was all in order, but had it pleased the commander in chief to look under the uniforms he would have found on every man a clean shirt, and in every knapsack the appointed number of articles, "awl, soap, and all," as the soldiers say. There was only one circumstance concerning which no one could be at ease. It was the state of the soldiers' boots. More than half the men's boots were in holes. But this defect was not due to any fault of the regimental commander, for in spite of repeated demands boots had not been issued by the Austrian commissariat, and the regiment had marched some seven hundred miles.

The commander of the regiment was an elderly, choleric, stout, and thick-set general with grizzled eyebrows and whiskers, and wider from chest to back than across the shoulders. He had on a brand-new uniform showing the creases where it had been folded and thick gold epaulettes which seemed to stand rather than lie down on his massive shoulders. He had the air of a man happily performing one of the most solemn duties of his life. He walked about in front of the line and at every step pulled himself up, slightly arching his back. It was plain that the commander admired his regiment, rejoiced in it, and that his whole mind was engrossed by it, yet his strut seemed to indicate that, besides military matters, social interests and the fair sex occupied no small part of his thoughts.

“Well, Michael Mítrich, sir?” he said, addressing one of the battalion commanders who smilingly pressed forward (it was plain that they both felt happy). “We had our hands full last night. However, I think the regiment is not a bad one, eh?”

The battalion commander perceived the jovial irony and laughed.

“It would not be turned off the field even on the Tsarítsin Meadow.”

“What?” asked the commander.

At that moment, on the road from the town on which signalers had been posted, two men appeared on horse back. They were an aide-de-camp followed by a Cossack.

The aide-de-camp was sent to confirm the order which had not been clearly worded the day before, namely, that the commander in chief wished to see the regiment just in the state in which it had been on the march: in their greatcoats, and packs, and without any preparation whatever.

A member of the Hofkriegsrath from Vienna had come to Kutúzov the day before with proposals and demands for him to join up with the army of the Archduke Ferdinand and Mack, and Kutúzov, not considering this junction advisable, meant, among other arguments in support of his view, to show the Austrian general the wretched state in which the troops arrived from Russia. With this object he intended to meet the regiment; so the worse the condition it was in, the better pleased the commander in chief would be. Though the aide-de-camp did not know these circumstances, he nevertheless delivered the definite order that the men should be in their greatcoats and in marching order, and that the commander in chief would otherwise be dissatisfied. On hearing this the regimental commander hung his head, silently shrugged his shoulders, and spread out his arms with a choleric gesture.

“A fine mess we’ve made of it!” he remarked.

“There now! Didn’t I tell you, Michael Mítrich, that if it was said ‘on the march’ it meant in greatcoats?” said he reproachfully to the battalion commander. “Oh, my God!” he added, stepping resolutely forward. “Company commanders!” he shouted in a voice accustomed to command. “Sergeants major!... How soon will he be here?” he asked the aide-de-camp with a respectful politeness evidently relating to the personage he was referring to.

“In an hour’s time, I should say.”

“Shall we have time to change clothes?”

“I don’t know, General...”

The regimental commander, going up to the line himself, ordered the

soldiers to change into their greatcoats. The company commanders ran off to their companies, the sergeants major began bustling (the greatcoats were not in very good condition), and instantly the squares that had up to then been in regular order and silent began to sway and stretch and hum with voices. On all sides soldiers were running to and fro, throwing up their knapsacks with a jerk of their shoulders and pulling the straps over their heads, unstrapping their overcoats and drawing the sleeves on with upraised arms.

In half an hour all was again in order, only the squares had become gray instead of black. The regimental commander walked with his jerky steps to the front of the regiment and examined it from a distance.

“Whatever is this? This!” he shouted and stood still. “Commander of the third company!”

“Commander of the third company wanted by the general!... commander to the general... third company to the commander.” The words passed along the lines and an adjutant ran to look for the missing officer.

When the eager but misrepeated words had reached their destination in a cry of: “The general to the third company,” the missing officer appeared from behind his company and, though he was a middle-aged man and not in the habit of running, trotted awkwardly stumbling on his toes toward the general. The captain’s face showed the uneasiness of a schoolboy who is told to repeat a lesson he has not learned. Spots appeared on his nose, the redness of which was evidently due to intemperance, and his mouth twitched nervously. The general looked the captain up and down as he came up panting, slackening his pace as he approached.

“You will soon be dressing your men in petticoats! What is this?” shouted the regimental commander, thrusting forward his jaw and pointing at a soldier in the ranks of the third company in a greatcoat of bluish cloth, which contrasted with the others. “What have you been after? The commander in chief is expected and you leave your place? Eh? I’ll teach you to dress the men in fancy coats for a parade.... Eh...?”

The commander of the company, with his eyes fixed on his superior, pressed two fingers more and more rigidly to his cap, as if in this pressure lay his only hope of salvation.

“Well, why don’t you speak? Whom have you got there dressed up as a Hungarian?” said the commander with an austere gibe.

“Your excellency...”

“Well, your excellency, what? Your excellency! But what about your excellency?... nobody knows.”

“Your excellency, it’s the officer Dólokhov, who has been reduced to the ranks,” said the captain softly.

“Well? Has he been degraded into a field marshal, or into a soldier?”

If a soldier, he should be dressed in regulation uniform like the others.”

“Your excellency, you gave him leave yourself, on the march.”

“Gave him leave? Leave? That’s just like you young men,” said the regimental commander cooling down a little. “Leave indeed.... One says a word to you and you... What?” he added with renewed irritation, “I beg you to dress your men decently.”

And the commander, turning to look at the adjutant, directed his jerky steps down the line. He was evidently pleased at his own display of anger and walking up to the regiment wished to find a further excuse for wrath. Having snapped at an officer for an unpolished badge, at another because his line was not straight, he reached the third company.

“H-o-o-w are you standing? Where’s your leg? Your leg?” shouted the commander with a tone of suffering in his voice, while there were still five men between him and Dólokhov with his bluish-gray uniform.

Dólokhov slowly straightened his bent knee, looking straight with his clear, insolent eyes in the general’s face.

“Why a blue coat? Off with it... Sergeant major! Change his coat... the ras...” he did not finish.

“General, I must obey orders, but I am not bound to endure...”
Dólokhov hurriedly interrupted.

“No talking in the ranks!... No talking, no talking!”

“Not bound to endure insults,” Dólokhov concluded in loud, ringing tones.

The eyes of the general and the soldier met. The general became silent, angrily pulling down his tight scarf.

“I request you to have the goodness to change your coat,” he said as he turned away.