

CHAPTER XI

Next day he woke late. Recalling his recent impressions, the first thought that came into his mind was that today he had to be presented to the Emperor Francis; he remembered the Minister of War, the polite Austrian adjutant, Bilíbin, and last night's conversation. Having dressed for his attendance at court in full parade uniform, which he had not worn for a long time, he went into Bilíbin's study fresh, animated, and handsome, with his hand bandaged. In the study were four gentlemen of the diplomatic corps. With Prince Hippolyte Kurágin, who was a secretary to the embassy, Bolkónski was already acquainted. Bilíbin introduced him to the others.

The gentlemen assembled at Bilíbin's were young, wealthy, gay society men, who here, as in Vienna, formed a special set which Bilíbin, their leader, called *les nôtres*. * This set, consisting almost exclusively of diplomats, evidently had its own interests which had nothing to do with war or politics but related to high society, to certain women, and to the official side of the service. These gentlemen received Prince Andrew as one of themselves, an honor they did not extend to many. From politeness and to start conversation, they asked him a few questions about the army and the battle, and then the talk went off into merry jests and gossip.

* Ours.

"But the best of it was," said one, telling of the misfortune of a fellow diplomat, "that the Chancellor told him flatly that his appointment to London was a promotion and that he was so to regard it. Can you fancy the figure he cut?..."

"But the worst of it, gentlemen—I am giving Kurágin away to you—is that that man suffers, and this Don Juan, wicked fellow, is taking advantage of it!"

Prince Hippolyte was lolling in a lounge chair with his legs over its arm. He began to laugh.

"Tell me about that!" he said.

"Oh, you Don Juan! You serpent!" cried several voices.

"You, Bolkónski, don't know," said Bilíbin turning to Prince Andrew, "that all the atrocities of the French army (I nearly said of the Russian army) are nothing compared to what this man has been doing among the women!"

"*La femme est la compagne de l'homme*," * announced Prince Hippolyte, and began looking through a lorgnette at his elevated legs.

* "Woman is man's companion."

Bilíbin and the rest of “ours” burst out laughing in Hippolyte’s face, and Prince Andrew saw that Hippolyte, of whom—he had to admit—he had almost been jealous on his wife’s account, was the butt of this set.

“Oh, I must give you a treat,” Bilíbin whispered to Bolkónski. “Kurágin is exquisite when he discusses politics—you should see his gravity!”

He sat down beside Hippolyte and wrinkling his forehead began talking to him about politics. Prince Andrew and the others gathered round these two.

“The Berlin cabinet cannot express a feeling of alliance,” began Hippolyte gazing round with importance at the others, “without expressing... as in its last note... you understand... Besides, unless His Majesty the Emperor derogates from the principle of our alliance...

“Wait, I have not finished...” he said to Prince Andrew, seizing him by the arm, “I believe that intervention will be stronger than nonintervention. And...” he paused. “Finally one cannot impute the nonreceipt of our dispatch of November 18. That is how it will end.” And he released Bolkónski’s arm to indicate that he had now quite finished.

“Demosthenes, I know thee by the pebble thou secretest in thy golden mouth!” said Bilíbin, and the mop of hair on his head moved with satisfaction.

Everybody laughed, and Hippolyte louder than anyone. He was evidently distressed, and breathed painfully, but could not restrain the wild laughter that convulsed his usually impassive features.

“Well now, gentlemen,” said Bilíbin, “Bolkónski is my guest in this house and in Brünn itself. I want to entertain him as far as I can, with all the pleasures of life here. If we were in Vienna it would be easy, but here, in this wretched Moravian hole, it is more difficult, and I beg you all to help me. Brünn’s attractions must be shown him. You can undertake the theater, I society, and you, Hippolyte, of course the women.”

“We must let him see Amelie, she’s exquisite!” said one of “ours,” kissing his finger tips.

“In general we must turn this bloodthirsty soldier to more humane interests,” said Bilíbin.

“I shall scarcely be able to avail myself of your hospitality, gentlemen, it is already time for me to go,” replied Prince Andrew looking at his watch.

“Where to?”

“To the Emperor.”

“Oh! Oh! Oh!”

“Well, au revoir, Bolkónski! Au revoir, Prince! Come back early to dinner,” cried several voices. “We’ll take you in hand.”

“When speaking to the Emperor, try as far as you can to praise the way that provisions are supplied and the routes indicated,” said Bilfbin, accompanying him to the hall.

“I should like to speak well of them, but as far as I know the facts, I can’t,” replied Bolkónski, smiling.

“Well, talk as much as you can, anyway. He has a passion for giving audiences, but he does not like talking himself and can’t do it, as you will see.”