

CHAPTER XI

The next day the Emperor stopped at Wischau, and Villier, his physician, was repeatedly summoned to see him. At headquarters and among the troops near by the news spread that the Emperor was unwell. He ate nothing and had slept badly that night, those around him reported. The cause of this indisposition was the strong impression made on his sensitive mind by the sight of the killed and wounded.

At daybreak on the seventeenth, a French officer who had come with a flag of truce, demanding an audience with the Russian Emperor, was brought into Wischau from our outposts. This officer was Savary. The Emperor had only just fallen asleep and so Savary had to wait. At midday he was admitted to the Emperor, and an hour later he rode off with Prince Dolgorúkov to the advanced post of the French army.

It was rumored that Savary had been sent to propose to Alexander a meeting with Napoleon. To the joy and pride of the whole army, a personal interview was refused, and instead of the Sovereign, Prince Dolgorúkov, the victor at Wischau, was sent with Savary to negotiate with Napoleon if, contrary to expectations, these negotiations were actuated by a real desire for peace.

Toward evening Dolgorúkov came back, went straight to the Tsar, and remained alone with him for a long time.

On the eighteenth and nineteenth of November, the army advanced two days' march and the enemy's outposts after a brief interchange of shots retreated. In the highest army circles from midday on the nineteenth, a great, excitedly bustling activity began which lasted till the morning of the twentieth, when the memorable battle of Austerlitz was fought.

Till midday on the nineteenth, the activity—the eager talk, running to and fro, and dispatching of adjutants—was confined to the Emperor's headquarters. But on the afternoon of that day, this activity reached Kutúzov's headquarters and the staffs of the commanders of columns. By evening, the adjutants had spread it to all ends and parts of the army, and in the night from the nineteenth to the twentieth, the whole eighty thousand allied troops rose from their bivouacs to the hum of voices, and the army swayed and started in one enormous mass six miles long.

The concentrated activity which had begun at the Emperor's headquarters in the morning and had started the whole movement that followed was like the first movement of the main wheel of a large tower clock. One wheel slowly moved, another was set in motion, and a third, and wheels began to revolve faster and faster, levers and cogwheels to work, chimes to play, figures to pop out, and the hands to advance with regular motion as a result of all that activity.

Just as in the mechanism of a clock, so in the mechanism of the military machine, an impulse once given leads to the final result; and just as

indifferently quiescent till the moment when motion is transmitted to them are the parts of the mechanism which the impulse has not yet reached. Wheels creak on their axles as the cogs engage one another and the revolving pulleys whirr with the rapidity of their movement, but a neighboring wheel is as quiet and motionless as though it were prepared to remain so for a hundred years; but the moment comes when the lever catches it and obeying the impulse that wheel begins to creak and joins in the common motion the result and aim of which are beyond its ken.

Just as in a clock, the result of the complicated motion of innumerable wheels and pulleys is merely a slow and regular movement of the hands which show the time, so the result of all the complicated human activities of 160,000 Russians and French—all their passions, desires, remorse, humiliations, sufferings, outbursts of pride, fear, and enthusiasm—was only the loss of the battle of Austerlitz, the so-called battle of the three Emperors—that is to say, a slow movement of the hand on the dial of human history.

Prince Andrew was on duty that day and in constant attendance on the commander in chief.

At six in the evening, Kutúzov went to the Emperor's headquarters and after staying but a short time with the Tsar went to see the grand marshal of the court, Count Tolstóy.

Bolkónski took the opportunity to go in to get some details of the coming action from Dolgorúkov. He felt that Kutúzov was upset and dissatisfied about something and that at headquarters they were dissatisfied with him, and also that at the Emperor's headquarters everyone adopted toward him the tone of men who know something others do not know: he therefore wished to speak to Dolgorúkov.

"Well, how d'you do, my dear fellow?" said Dolgorúkov, who was sitting at tea with Bilíbin. "The fete is for tomorrow. How is your old fellow? Out of sorts?"

"I won't say he is out of sorts, but I fancy he would like to be heard."

"But they heard him at the council of war and will hear him when he talks sense, but to temporize and wait for something now when Bonaparte fears nothing so much as a general battle is impossible."

"Yes, you have seen him?" said Prince Andrew. "Well, what is Bonaparte like? How did he impress you?"

"Yes, I saw him, and am convinced that he fears nothing so much as a general engagement," repeated Dolgorúkov, evidently prizing this general conclusion which he had arrived at from his interview with Napoleon. "If he weren't afraid of a battle why did he ask for that interview? Why negotiate, and above all why retreat, when to retreat is so contrary to his method of conducting war? Believe me, he is afraid, afraid of a general battle. His hour has come! Mark my words!"

“But tell me, what is he like, eh?” said Prince Andrew again.

“He is a man in a gray overcoat, very anxious that I should call him ‘Your Majesty,’ but who, to his chagrin, got no title from me! That’s the sort of man he is, and nothing more,” replied Dolgorúkov, looking round at Bilíbin with a smile.

“Despite my great respect for old Kutúzov,” he continued, “we should be a nice set of fellows if we were to wait about and so give him a chance to escape, or to trick us, now that we certainly have him in our hands! No, we mustn’t forget Suvórov and his rule—not to put yourself in a position to be attacked, but yourself to attack. Believe me in war the energy of young men often shows the way better than all the experience of old Cunctators.”

“But in what position are we going to attack him? I have been at the outposts today and it is impossible to say where his chief forces are situated,” said Prince Andrew.

He wished to explain to Dolgorúkov a plan of attack he had himself formed.

“Oh, that is all the same,” Dolgorúkov said quickly, and getting up he spread a map on the table. “All eventualities have been foreseen. If he is standing before Brünn...”

And Prince Dolgorúkov rapidly but indistinctly explained Weyrother’s plan of a flanking movement.

Prince Andrew began to reply and to state his own plan, which might have been as good as Weyrother’s, but for the disadvantage that Weyrother’s had already been approved. As soon as Prince Andrew began to demonstrate the defects of the latter and the merits of his own plan, Prince Dolgorúkov ceased to listen to him and gazed absent-mindedly not at the map, but at Prince Andrew’s face.

“There will be a council of war at Kutúzov’s tonight, though; you can say all this there,” remarked Dolgorúkov.

“I will do so,” said Prince Andrew, moving away from the map.

“Whatever are you bothering about, gentlemen?” said Bilíbin, who, till then, had listened with an amused smile to their conversation and now was evidently ready with a joke. “Whether tomorrow brings victory or defeat, the glory of our Russian arms is secure. Except your Kutúzov, there is not a single Russian in command of a column! The commanders are: Herr General Wimpfen, le Comte de Langeron, le Prince de Lichtenstein, le Prince de Hohenlohe, and finally Prishprish, and so on like all those Polish names.”

“Be quiet, backbiter!” said Dolgorúkov. “It is not true; there are now two Russians, Milorádovich, and Dokhtúrov, and there would be a third, Count Arakchéev, if his nerves were not too weak.”

“However, I think General Kutúzov has come out,” said Prince Andrew. “I wish you good luck and success, gentlemen!” he added and went out after shaking hands with Dolgorúkov and Bilíbin.

On the way home, Prince Andrew could not refrain from asking Kutúzov, who was sitting silently beside him, what he thought of tomorrow’s battle.

Kutúzov looked sternly at his adjutant and, after a pause, replied: “I think the battle will be lost, and so I told Count Tolstóy and asked him to tell the Emperor. What do you think he replied? ‘But, my dear general, I am engaged with rice and cutlets, look after military matters yourself!’ Yes... That was the answer I got!”