

CHAPTER XV

At eight o'clock Kutúzov rode to Pratzen at the head of the fourth column, Milorádovich's, the one that was to take the place of Przebyszéwski's and Langeron's columns which had already gone down into the valley. He greeted the men of the foremost regiment and gave them the order to march, thereby indicating that he intended to lead that column himself. When he had reached the village of Pratzen he halted. Prince Andrew was behind, among the immense number forming the commander in chief's suite. He was in a state of suppressed excitement and irritation, though controlledly calm as a man is at the approach of a long-awaited moment. He was firmly convinced that this was the day of his Toulon, or his bridge of Arcola. How it would come about he did not know, but he felt sure it would do so. The locality and the position of our troops were known to him as far as they could be known to anyone in our army. His own strategic plan, which obviously could not now be carried out, was forgotten. Now, entering into Weyrother's plan, Prince Andrew considered possible contingencies and formed new projects such as might call for his rapidity of perception and decision.

To the left down below in the mist, the musketry fire of unseen forces could be heard. It was there Prince Andrew thought the fight would concentrate. "There we shall encounter difficulties, and there," thought he, "I shall be sent with a brigade or division, and there, standard in hand, I shall go forward and break whatever is in front of me."

He could not look calmly at the standards of the passing battalions. Seeing them he kept thinking, "That may be the very standard with which I shall lead the army."

In the morning all that was left of the night mist on the heights was a hoar frost now turning to dew, but in the valleys it still lay like a milk-white sea. Nothing was visible in the valley to the left into which our troops had descended and from whence came the sounds of firing. Above the heights was the dark clear sky, and to the right the vast orb of the sun. In front, far off on the farther shore of that sea of mist, some wooded hills were discernible, and it was there the enemy probably was, for something could be descried. On the right the Guards were entering the misty region with a sound of hoofs and wheels and now and then a gleam of bayonets; to the left beyond the village similar masses of cavalry came up and disappeared in the sea of mist. In front and behind moved infantry. The commander in chief was standing at the end of the village letting the troops pass by him. That morning Kutúzov seemed worn and irritable. The infantry passing before him came to a halt without any command being given, apparently obstructed by something in front.

"Do order them to form into battalion columns and go round the village!" he said angrily to a general who had ridden up. "Don't you understand, your excellency, my dear sir, that you must not defile through narrow village streets when we are marching against the enemy?"

“I intended to re-form them beyond the village, your excellency,” answered the general.

Kutúzov laughed bitterly.

“You’ll make a fine thing of it, deploying in sight of the enemy! Very fine!”

“The enemy is still far away, your excellency. According to the dispositions...”

“The dispositions!” exclaimed Kutúzov bitterly. “Who told you that?... Kindly do as you are ordered.”

“Yes, sir.”

“My dear fellow,” Nesvítski whispered to Prince Andrew, “the old man is as surly as a dog.”

An Austrian officer in a white uniform with green plumes in his hat galloped up to Kutúzov and asked in the Emperor’s name had the fourth column advanced into action.

Kutúzov turned round without answering and his eye happened to fall upon Prince Andrew, who was beside him. Seeing him, Kutúzov’s malevolent and caustic expression softened, as if admitting that what was being done was not his adjutant’s fault, and still not answering the Austrian adjutant, he addressed Bolkónski.

“Go, my dear fellow, and see whether the third division has passed the village. Tell it to stop and await my orders.”

Hardly had Prince Andrew started than he stopped him.

“And ask whether sharpshooters have been posted,” he added. “What are they doing? What are they doing?” he murmured to himself, still not replying to the Austrian.

Prince Andrew galloped off to execute the order.

Overtaking the battalions that continued to advance, he stopped the third division and convinced himself that there really were no sharpshooters in front of our columns. The colonel at the head of the regiment was much surprised at the commander in chief’s order to throw out skirmishers. He had felt perfectly sure that there were other troops in front of him and that the enemy must be at least six miles away. There was really nothing to be seen in front except a barren descent hidden by dense mist. Having given orders in the commander in chief’s name to rectify this omission, Prince Andrew galloped back. Kutúzov still in the same place, his stout body resting heavily in the saddle with the lassitude of age, sat yawning wearily with closed eyes. The troops were no longer moving, but stood with the butts of their muskets on the ground.

“All right, all right!” he said to Prince Andrew, and turned to a general who, watch in hand, was saying it was time they started as all the left-flank columns had already descended.

“Plenty of time, your excellency,” muttered Kutúzov in the midst of a yawn. “Plenty of time,” he repeated.

Just then at a distance behind Kutúzov was heard the sound of regiments saluting, and this sound rapidly came nearer along the whole extended line of the advancing Russian columns. Evidently the person they were greeting was riding quickly. When the soldiers of the regiment in front of which Kutúzov was standing began to shout, he rode a little to one side and looked round with a frown. Along the road from Pratzen galloped what looked like a squadron of horsemen in various uniforms. Two of them rode side by side in front, at full gallop. One in a black uniform with white plumes in his hat rode a bobtailed chestnut horse, the other who was in a white uniform rode a black one. These were the two Emperors followed by their suites. Kutúzov, affecting the manners of an old soldier at the front, gave the command “Attention!” and rode up to the Emperors with a salute. His whole appearance and manner were suddenly transformed. He put on the air of a subordinate who obeys without reasoning. With an affectation of respect which evidently struck Alexander unpleasantly, he rode up and saluted.

This unpleasant impression merely flitted over the young and happy face of the Emperor like a cloud of haze across a clear sky and vanished. After his illness he looked rather thinner that day than on the field of Olmütz where Bolkónski had seen him for the first time abroad, but there was still the same bewitching combination of majesty and mildness in his fine gray eyes, and on his delicate lips the same capacity for varying expression and the same prevalent appearance of goodhearted innocent youth.

At the Olmütz review he had seemed more majestic; here he seemed brighter and more energetic. He was slightly flushed after galloping two miles, and reining in his horse he sighed restfully and looked round at the faces of his suite, young and animated as his own. Czartorýski, Novosíltsev, Prince Volkónsky, Strógonov, and the others, all richly dressed gay young men on splendid, well-groomed, fresh, only slightly heated horses, exchanging remarks and smiling, had stopped behind the Emperor. The Emperor Francis, a rosy, long faced young man, sat very erect on his handsome black horse, looking about him in a leisurely and preoccupied manner. He beckoned to one of his white adjutants and asked some question—“Most likely he is asking at what o’clock they started,” thought Prince Andrew, watching his old acquaintance with a smile he could not repress as he recalled his reception at Brünn. In the Emperors’ suite were the picked young orderly officers of the Guard and line regiments, Russian and Austrian. Among them were grooms leading the Tsar’s beautiful relay horses covered with embroidered cloths.

As when a window is opened a whiff of fresh air from the fields enters a stuffy room, so a whiff of youthfulness, energy, and confidence of

success reached Kutúzov's cheerless staff with the galloping advent of all these brilliant young men.

"Why aren't you beginning, Michael Ilariónovich?" said the Emperor Alexander hurriedly to Kutúzov, glancing courteously at the same time at the Emperor Francis.

"I am waiting, Your Majesty," answered Kutúzov, bending forward respectfully.

The Emperor, frowning slightly, bent his ear forward as if he had not quite heard.

"Waiting, Your Majesty," repeated Kutúzov. (Prince Andrew noted that Kutúzov's upper lip twitched unnaturally as he said the word "waiting.") "Not all the columns have formed up yet, Your Majesty."

The Tsar heard but obviously did not like the reply; he shrugged his rather round shoulders and glanced at Novosiltsev who was near him, as if complaining of Kutúzov.

"You know, Michael Ilariónovich, we are not on the Empress' Field where a parade does not begin till all the troops are assembled," said the Tsar with another glance at the Emperor Francis, as if inviting him if not to join in at least to listen to what he was saying. But the Emperor Francis continued to look about him and did not listen.

"That is just why I do not begin, sire," said Kutúzov in a resounding voice, apparently to preclude the possibility of not being heard, and again something in his face twitched—"That is just why I do not begin, sire, because we are not on parade and not on the Empress' Field," said he clearly and distinctly.

In the Emperor's suite all exchanged rapid looks that expressed dissatisfaction and reproach. "Old though he may be, he should not, he certainly should not, speak like that," their glances seemed to say.

The Tsar looked intently and observantly into Kutúzov's eye waiting to hear whether he would say anything more. But Kutúzov, with respectfully bowed head, seemed also to be waiting. The silence lasted for about a minute.

"However, if you command it, Your Majesty," said Kutúzov, lifting his head and again assuming his former tone of a dull, unreasoning, but submissive general.

He touched his horse and having called Milorádovich, the commander of the column, gave him the order to advance.

The troops again began to move, and two battalions of the Nóvgorod and one of the Ápsheon regiment went forward past the Emperor.

As this Ápsheon battalion marched by, the red-faced Milorádovich,

without his greatcoat, with his Orders on his breast and an enormous tuft of plumes in his cocked hat worn on one side with its corners front and back, galloped strenuously forward, and with a dashing salute reined in his horse before the Emperor.

“God be with you, general!” said the Emperor.

“Ma foi, sire, nous ferons ce qui sera dans notre possibilité, sire,” * he answered gaily, raising nevertheless ironic smiles among the gentlemen of the Tsar’s suite by his poor French.

* “Indeed, Sire, we shall do everything it is possible to do, Sire.”

Milorádovich wheeled his horse sharply and stationed himself a little behind the Emperor. The Ápsheon men, excited by the Tsar’s presence, passed in step before the Emperors and their suites at a bold, brisk pace.

“Lads!” shouted Milorádovich in a loud, self-confident, and cheery voice, obviously so elated by the sound of firing, by the prospect of battle, and by the sight of the gallant Ápsheons, his comrades in Suvórov’s time, now passing so gallantly before the Emperors, that he forgot the sovereigns’ presence. “Lads, it’s not the first village you’ve had to take,” cried he.

“Glad to do our best!” shouted the soldiers.

The Emperor’s horse started at the sudden cry. This horse that had carried the sovereign at reviews in Russia bore him also here on the field of Austerlitz, enduring the heedless blows of his left foot and pricking its ears at the sound of shots just as it had done on the Empress’ Field, not understanding the significance of the firing, nor of the nearness of the Emperor Francis’ black cob, nor of all that was being said, thought, and felt that day by its rider.

The Emperor turned with a smile to one of his followers and made a remark to him, pointing to the gallant Ápsheons.