

CHAPTER XV

On receiving command of the armies Kutúzov remembered Prince Andrew and sent an order for him to report at headquarters.

Prince Andrew arrived at Tsárevo-Zaymíshche on the very day and at the very hour that Kutúzov was reviewing the troops for the first time. He stopped in the village at the priest's house in front of which stood the commander in chief's carriage, and he sat down on the bench at the gate awaiting his Serene Highness, as everyone now called Kutúzov. From the field beyond the village came now sounds of regimental music and now the roar of many voices shouting "Hurrah!" to the new commander in chief. Two orderlies, a courier and a major-domo, stood near by, some ten paces from Prince Andrew, availing themselves of Kutúzov's absence and of the fine weather. A short, swarthy lieutenant colonel of hussars with thick mustaches and whiskers rode up to the gate and, glancing at Prince Andrew, inquired whether his Serene Highness was putting up there and whether he would soon be back.

Prince Andrew replied that he was not on his Serene Highness' staff but was himself a new arrival. The lieutenant colonel turned to a smart orderly, who, with the peculiar contempt with which a commander in chief's orderly speaks to officers, replied:

"What? His Serene Highness? I expect he'll be here soon. What do you want?"

The lieutenant colonel of hussars smiled beneath his mustache at the orderly's tone, dismounted, gave his horse to a dispatch runner, and approached Bolkónski with a slight bow. Bolkónski made room for him on the bench and the lieutenant colonel sat down beside him.

"You're also waiting for the commander in chief?" said he. "They say he weceives evewyone, thank God!... It's awful with those sausage eaters! Ermólov had weason to ask to be pwomoted to be a German! Now p'waps Wussians will get a look in. As it was, devil only knows what was happening. We kept wetweating and wetweating. Did you take part in the campaign?" he asked.

"I had the pleasure," replied Prince Andrew, "not only of taking part in the retreat but of losing in that retreat all I held dear—not to mention the estate and home of my birth—my father, who died of grief. I belong to the province of Smolénsk."

"Ah? You're Pwince Bolkónski? Vewy glad to make your acquaintance! I'm Lieutenant Colonel Denísov, better known as 'Váska,'" said Denísov, pressing Prince Andrew's hand and looking into his face with a particularly kindly attention. "Yes, I heard," said he sympathetically, and after a short pause added: "Yes, it's Scythian warfare. It's all vewy well—only not for those who get it in the neck. So you are Pwince Andrew Bolkónski?" He swayed his head. "Vewy pleased, Pwince, to make your acquaintance!" he repeated again, smiling sadly, and he again pressed Prince Andrew's hand.

Prince Andrew knew Denísov from what Natásha had told him of her first suitor. This memory carried him sadly and sweetly back to those painful feelings of which he had not thought lately, but which still found place in his soul. Of late he had received so many new and very serious impressions—such as the retreat from Smolénsk, his visit to Bald Hills, and the recent news of his father's death—and had experienced so many emotions, that for a long time past those memories had not entered his mind, and now that they did, they did not act on him with nearly their former strength. For Denísov, too, the memories awakened by the name of Bolkónski belonged to a distant, romantic past, when after supper and after Natásha's singing he had proposed to a little girl of fifteen without realizing what he was doing. He smiled at the recollection of that time and of his love for Natásha, and passed at once to what now interested him passionately and exclusively. This was a plan of campaign he had devised while serving at the outposts during the retreat. He had proposed that plan to Barclay de Tolly and now wished to propose it to Kutúzov. The plan was based on the fact that the French line of operation was too extended, and it proposed that instead of, or concurrently with, action on the front to bar the advance of the French, we should attack their line of communication. He began explaining his plan to Prince Andrew.

“They can't hold all that line. It's impossible. I will undertake to bweak through. Give me five hundred men and I will bweak the line, that's certain! There's only one way—guewilla warfare!”

Denísov rose and began gesticulating as he explained his plan to Bolkónski. In the midst of his explanation shouts were heard from the army, growing more incoherent and more diffused, mingling with music and songs and coming from the field where the review was held. Sounds of hoofs and shouts were nearing the village.

“He's coming! He's coming!” shouted a Cossack standing at the gate.

Bolkónski and Denísov moved to the gate, at which a knot of soldiers (a guard of honor) was standing, and they saw Kutúzov coming down the street mounted on a rather small sorrel horse. A huge suite of generals rode behind him. Barclay was riding almost beside him, and a crowd of officers ran after and around them shouting, “Hurrah!”

His adjutants galloped into the yard before him. Kutúzov was impatiently urging on his horse, which ambled smoothly under his weight, and he raised his hand to his white Horse Guard's cap with a red band and no peak, nodding his head continually. When he came up to the guard of honor, a fine set of Grenadiers mostly wearing decorations, who were giving him the salute, he looked at them silently and attentively for nearly a minute with the steady gaze of a commander and then turned to the crowd of generals and officers surrounding him. Suddenly his face assumed a subtle expression, he shrugged his shoulders with an air of perplexity.

“And with such fine fellows to retreat and retreat! Well, good-by, General,” he added, and rode into the yard past Prince Andrew and

Denísov.

“Hurrah! hurrah! hurrah!” shouted those behind him.

Since Prince Andrew had last seen him Kutúzov had grown still more corpulent, flaccid, and fat. But the bleached eyeball, the scar, and the familiar weariness of his expression were still the same. He was wearing the white Horse Guard’s cap and a military overcoat with a whip hanging over his shoulder by a thin strap. He sat heavily and swayed limply on his brisk little horse.

“Whew... whew... whew!” he whistled just audibly as he rode into the yard. His face expressed the relief of relaxed strain felt by a man who means to rest after a ceremony. He drew his left foot out of the stirrup and, lurching with his whole body and puckering his face with the effort, raised it with difficulty onto the saddle, leaned on his knee, groaned, and slipped down into the arms of the Cossacks and adjutants who stood ready to assist him.

He pulled himself together, looked round, screwing up his eyes, glanced at Prince Andrew, and, evidently not recognizing him, moved with his waddling gait to the porch. “Whew... whew... whew!” he whistled, and again glanced at Prince Andrew. As often occurs with old men, it was only after some seconds that the impression produced by Prince Andrew’s face linked itself up with Kutúzov’s remembrance of his personality.

“Ah, how do you do, my dear prince? How do you do, my dear boy? Come along...” said he, glancing wearily round, and he stepped onto the porch which creaked under his weight.

He unbuttoned his coat and sat down on a bench in the porch.

“And how’s your father?”

“I received news of his death, yesterday,” replied Prince Andrew abruptly.

Kutúzov looked at him with eyes wide open with dismay and then took off his cap and crossed himself:

“May the kingdom of Heaven be his! God’s will be done to us all!” He sighed deeply, his whole chest heaving, and was silent for a while. “I loved him and respected him, and sympathize with you with all my heart.”

He embraced Prince Andrew, pressing him to his fat breast, and for some time did not let him go. When he released him Prince Andrew saw that Kutúzov’s flabby lips were trembling and that tears were in his eyes. He sighed and pressed on the bench with both hands to raise himself.

“Come! Come with me, we’ll have a talk,” said he.

But at that moment Denísov, no more intimidated by his superiors than by the enemy, came with jingling spurs up the steps of the porch, despite the angry whispers of the adjutants who tried to stop him. Kutúzov, his

hands still pressed on the seat, glanced at him glumly. Denísov, having given his name, announced that he had to communicate to his Serene Highness a matter of great importance for their country's welfare. Kutúzov looked wearily at him and, lifting his hands with a gesture of annoyance, folded them across his stomach, repeating the words: "For our country's welfare? Well, what is it? Speak!" Denísov blushed like a girl (it was strange to see the color rise in that shaggy, bibulous, time-worn face) and boldly began to expound his plan of cutting the enemy's lines of communication between Smolénsk and Vyázma. Denísov came from those parts and knew the country well. His plan seemed decidedly a good one, especially from the strength of conviction with which he spoke. Kutúzov looked down at his own legs, occasionally glancing at the door of the adjoining hut as if expecting something unpleasant to emerge from it. And from that hut, while Denísov was speaking, a general with a portfolio under his arm really did appear.

"What?" said Kutúzov, in the midst of Denísov's explanations, "are you ready so soon?"

"Ready, your Serene Highness," replied the general.

Kutúzov swayed his head, as much as to say: "How is one man to deal with it all?" and again listened to Denísov.

"I give my word of honor as a Wussian officer," said Denísov, "that I can break Napoleon's line of communication!"

"What relation are you to Intendant General Kiríl Andréévich Denísov?" asked Kutúzov, interrupting him.

"He is my uncle, your Serene Highness."

"Ah, we were friends," said Kutúzov cheerfully. "All right, all right, friend, stay here at the staff and tomorrow we'll have a talk."

With a nod to Denísov he turned away and put out his hand for the papers Konovnítsyn had brought him.

"Would not your Serene Highness like to come inside?" said the general on duty in a discontented voice, "the plans must be examined and several papers have to be signed."

An adjutant came out and announced that everything was in readiness within. But Kutúzov evidently did not wish to enter that room till he was disengaged. He made a grimace....

"No, tell them to bring a small table out here, my dear boy. I'll look at them here," said he. "Don't go away," he added, turning to Prince Andrew, who remained in the porch and listened to the general's report.

While this was being given, Prince Andrew heard the whisper of a woman's voice and the rustle of a silk dress behind the door. Several times on glancing that way he noticed behind that door a plump, rosy, handsome woman in a pink dress with a lilac silk kerchief on her head, holding

a dish and evidently awaiting the entrance of the commander in chief. Kutúzov's adjutant whispered to Prince Andrew that this was the wife of the priest whose home it was, and that she intended to offer his Serene Highness bread and salt. "Her husband has welcomed his Serene Highness with the cross at the church, and she intends to welcome him in the house.... She's very pretty," added the adjutant with a smile. At those words Kutúzov looked round. He was listening to the general's report—which consisted chiefly of a criticism of the position at Tsárevo-Zaymíshche—as he had listened to Denísov, and seven years previously had listened to the discussion at the Austerlitz council of war. He evidently listened only because he had ears which, though there was a piece of tow in one of them, could not help hearing; but it was evident that nothing the general could say would surprise or even interest him, that he knew all that would be said beforehand, and heard it all only because he had to, as one has to listen to the chanting of a service of prayer. All that Denísov had said was clever and to the point. What the general was saying was even more clever and to the point, but it was evident that Kutúzov despised knowledge and cleverness, and knew of something else that would decide the matter—something independent of cleverness and knowledge. Prince Andrew watched the commander in chief's face attentively, and the only expression he could see there was one of boredom, curiosity as to the meaning of the feminine whispering behind the door, and a desire to observe propriety. It was evident that Kutúzov despised cleverness and learning and even the patriotic feeling shown by Denísov, but despised them not because of his own intellect, feelings, or knowledge—he did not try to display any of these—but because of something else. He despised them because of his old age and experience of life. The only instruction Kutúzov gave of his own accord during that report referred to looting by the Russian troops. At the end of the report the general put before him for signature a paper relating to the recovery of payment from army commanders for green oats mown down by the soldiers, when landowners lodged petitions for compensation.

After hearing the matter, Kutúzov smacked his lips together and shook his head.

"Into the stove... into the fire with it! I tell you once for all, my dear fellow," said he, "into the fire with all such things! Let them cut the crops and burn wood to their hearts' content. I don't order it or allow it, but I don't exact compensation either. One can't get on without it. 'When wood is chopped the chips will fly.'" He looked at the paper again. "Oh, this German precision!" he muttered, shaking his head.