

CHAPTER XXXV

On the rug-covered bench where Pierre had seen him in the morning sat Kutúzov, his gray head hanging, his heavy body relaxed. He gave no orders, but only assented to or dissented from what others suggested.

“Yes, yes, do that,” he replied to various proposals. “Yes, yes: go, dear boy, and have a look,” he would say to one or another of those about him; or, “No, don’t, we’d better wait!” He listened to the reports that were brought him and gave directions when his subordinates demanded that of him; but when listening to the reports it seemed as if he were not interested in the import of the words spoken, but rather in something else—in the expression of face and tone of voice of those who were reporting. By long years of military experience he knew, and with the wisdom of age understood, that it is impossible for one man to direct hundreds of thousands of others struggling with death, and he knew that the result of a battle is decided not by the orders of a commander in chief, nor the place where the troops are stationed, nor by the number of cannon or of slaughtered men, but by that intangible force called the spirit of the army, and he watched this force and guided it in as far as that was in his power.

Kutúzov’s general expression was one of concentrated quiet attention, and his face wore a strained look as if he found it difficult to master the fatigue of his old and feeble body.

At eleven o’clock they brought him news that the flèches captured by the French had been retaken, but that Prince Bagration was wounded. Kutúzov groaned and swayed his head.

“Ride over to Prince Peter Ivánovich and find out about it exactly,” he said to one of his adjutants, and then turned to the Duke of Württemberg who was standing behind him.

“Will Your Highness please take command of the first army?”

Soon after the duke’s departure—before he could possibly have reached Seménovsk—his adjutant came back from him and told Kutúzov that the duke asked for more troops.

Kutúzov made a grimace and sent an order to Dokhtúrov to take over the command of the first army, and a request to the duke—whom he said he could not spare at such an important moment—to return to him. When they brought him news that Murat had been taken prisoner, and the staff officers congratulated him, Kutúzov smiled.

“Wait a little, gentlemen,” said he. “The battle is won, and there is nothing extraordinary in the capture of Murat. Still, it is better to wait before we rejoice.”

But he sent an adjutant to take the news round the army.

When Scherbínin came galloping from the left flank with news that the

French had captured the flèches and the village of Semënovsk, Kutúzov, guessing by the sounds of the battle and by Scherbínin's looks that the news was bad, rose as if to stretch his legs and, taking Scherbínin's arm, led him aside.

“Go, my dear fellow,” he said to Ermólov, “and see whether something can't be done.”

Kutúzov was in Górkí, near the center of the Russian position. The attack directed by Napoleon against our left flank had been several times repulsed. In the center the French had not got beyond Borodinó, and on their left flank Uvárov's cavalry had put the French to flight.

Toward three o'clock the French attacks ceased. On the faces of all who came from the field of battle, and of those who stood around him, Kutúzov noticed an expression of extreme tension. He was satisfied with the day's success—a success exceeding his expectations, but the old man's strength was failing him. Several times his head dropped low as if it were falling and he dozed off. Dinner was brought him.

Adjutant General Wolzogen, the man who when riding past Prince Andrew had said, “the war should be extended widely,” and whom Bagратиón so detested, rode up while Kutúzov was at dinner. Wolzogen had come from Barclay de Tolly to report on the progress of affairs on the left flank. The sagacious Barclay de Tolly, seeing crowds of wounded men running back and the disordered rear of the army, weighed all the circumstances, concluded that the battle was lost, and sent his favorite officer to the commander in chief with that news.

Kutúzov was chewing a piece of roast chicken with difficulty and glanced at Wolzogen with eyes that brightened under their puckering lids.

Wolzogen, nonchalantly stretching his legs, approached Kutúzov with a half-contemptuous smile on his lips, scarcely touching the peak of his cap.

He treated his Serene Highness with a somewhat affected nonchalance intended to show that, as a highly trained military man, he left it to Russians to make an idol of this useless old man, but that he knew whom he was dealing with. “Der alte Herr” (as in their own set the Germans called Kutúzov) “is making himself very comfortable,” thought Wolzogen, and looking severely at the dishes in front of Kutúzov he began to report to “the old gentleman” the position of affairs on the left flank as Barclay had ordered him to and as he himself had seen and understood it.

“All the points of our position are in the enemy's hands and we cannot dislodge them for lack of troops, the men are running away and it is impossible to stop them,” he reported.

Kutúzov ceased chewing and fixed an astonished gaze on Wolzogen, as if not understanding what was said to him. Wolzogen, noticing “the old gentleman's” agitation, said with a smile:

“I have not considered it right to conceal from your Serene Highness what I have seen. The troops are in complete disorder....”

“You have seen? You have seen?...” Kutúzov shouted. Frowning and rising quickly, he went up to Wolzogen.

“How... how dare you!...” he shouted, choking and making a threatening gesture with his trembling arms: “How dare you, sir, say that to me? You know nothing about it. Tell General Barclay from me that his information is incorrect and that the real course of the battle is better known to me, the commander in chief, than to him.”

Wolzogen was about to make a rejoinder, but Kutúzov interrupted him.

“The enemy has been repulsed on the left and defeated on the right flank. If you have seen amiss, sir, do not allow yourself to say what you don’t know! Be so good as to ride to General Barclay and inform him of my firm intention to attack the enemy tomorrow,” said Kutúzov sternly.

All were silent, and the only sound audible was the heavy breathing of the panting old general.

“They are repulsed everywhere, for which I thank God and our brave army! The enemy is beaten, and tomorrow we shall drive him from the sacred soil of Russia,” said Kutúzov crossing himself, and he suddenly sobbed as his eyes filled with tears.

Wolzogen, shrugging his shoulders and curling his lips, stepped silently aside, marveling at “the old gentleman’s” conceited stupidity.

“Ah, here he is, my hero!” said Kutúzov to a portly, handsome, dark-haired general who was just ascending the knoll.

This was Raévski, who had spent the whole day at the most important part of the field of Borodinó.

Raévski reported that the troops were firmly holding their ground and that the French no longer ventured to attack.

After hearing him, Kutúzov said in French:

“Then you do not think, like some others, that we must retreat?”

“On the contrary, your Highness, in indecisive actions it is always the most stubborn who remain victors,” replied Raévski, “and in my opinion...”

“Kaysárov!” Kutúzov called to his adjutant. “Sit down and write out the order of the day for tomorrow. And you,” he continued, addressing another, “ride along the line and announce that tomorrow we attack.”

While Kutúzov was talking to Raévski and dictating the order of the day, Wolzogen returned from Barclay and said that General Barclay wished to

have written confirmation of the order the field marshal had given.

Kutúzov, without looking at Wolzogen, gave directions for the order to be written out which the former commander in chief, to avoid personal responsibility, very judiciously wished to receive.

And by means of that mysterious indefinable bond which maintains throughout an army one and the same temper, known as “the spirit of the army,” and which constitutes the sinew of war, Kutúzov’s words, his order for a battle next day, immediately became known from one end of the army to the other.

It was far from being the same words or the same order that reached the farthest links of that chain. The tales passing from mouth to mouth at different ends of the army did not even resemble what Kutúzov had said, but the sense of his words spread everywhere because what he said was not the outcome of cunning calculations, but of a feeling that lay in the commander in chief’s soul as in that of every Russian.

And on learning that tomorrow they were to attack the enemy, and hearing from the highest quarters a confirmation of what they wanted to believe, the exhausted, wavering men felt comforted and inspirited.