

## CHAPTER IV

Bennigsen's note and the Cossack's information that the left flank of the French was unguarded were merely final indications that it was necessary to order an attack, and it was fixed for the fifth of October.

On the morning of the fourth of October Kutúzov signed the dispositions. Toll read them to Ermólov, asking him to attend to the further arrangements.

"All right—all right. I haven't time just now," replied Ermólov, and left the hut.

The dispositions drawn up by Toll were very good. As in the Austerlitz dispositions, it was written—though not in German this time:

"The First Column will march here and here," "the Second Column will march there and there," and so on; and on paper, all these columns arrived at their places at the appointed time and destroyed the enemy. Everything had been admirably thought out as is usual in dispositions, and as is always the case, not a single column reached its place at the appointed time.

When the necessary number of copies of the dispositions had been prepared, an officer was summoned and sent to deliver them to Ermólov to deal with. A young officer of the Horse Guards, Kutúzov's orderly, pleased at the importance of the mission entrusted to him, went to Ermólov's quarters.

"Gone away," said Ermólov's orderly.

The officer of the Horse Guards went to a general with whom Ermólov was often to be found.

"No, and the general's out too."

The officer, mounting his horse, rode off to someone else.

"No, he's gone out."

"If only they don't make me responsible for this delay! What a nuisance it is!" thought the officer, and he rode round the whole camp. One man said he had seen Ermólov ride past with some other generals, others said he must have returned home. The officer searched till six o'clock in the evening without even stopping to eat. Ermólov was nowhere to be found and no one knew where he was. The officer snatched a little food at a comrade's, and rode again to the vanguard to find Milorádovich. Milorádovich too was away, but here he was told that he had gone to a ball at General Kíkin's and that Ermólov was probably there too.

"But where is it?"

"Why, there, over at Échkino," said a Cossack officer, pointing to a

country house in the far distance.

“What, outside our line?”

“They’ve put two regiments as outposts, and they’re having such a spree there, it’s awful! Two bands and three sets of singers!”

The officer rode out beyond our lines to Échkino. While still at a distance he heard as he rode the merry sounds of a soldier’s dance song proceeding from the house.

“In the meadows... in the meadows!” he heard, accompanied by whistling and the sound of a torban, drowned every now and then by shouts. These sounds made his spirits rise, but at the same time he was afraid that he would be blamed for not having executed sooner the important order entrusted to him. It was already past eight o’clock. He dismounted and went up into the porch of a large country house which had remained intact between the Russian and French forces. In the refreshment room and the hall, footmen were bustling about with wine and viands. Groups of singers stood outside the windows. The officer was admitted and immediately saw all the chief generals of the army together, and among them Ermólov’s big imposing figure. They all had their coats unbuttoned and were standing in a semicircle with flushed and animated faces, laughing loudly. In the middle of the room a short handsome general with a red face was dancing the trepák with much spirit and agility.

“Ha, ha, ha! Bravo, Nicholas Iványch! Ha, ha, ha!”

The officer felt that by arriving with important orders at such a moment he was doubly to blame, and he would have preferred to wait; but one of the generals espied him and, hearing what he had come about, informed Ermólov.

Ermólov came forward with a frown on his face and, hearing what the officer had to say, took the papers from him without a word.

“You think he went off just by chance?” said a comrade, who was on the staff that evening, to the officer of the Horse Guards, referring to Ermólov. “It was a trick. It was done on purpose to get Konovnítsyn into trouble. You’ll see what a mess there’ll be tomorrow.”