

## CHAPTER XVI

It was a warm, dark, autumn night. It had been raining for four days. Having changed horses twice and galloped twenty miles in an hour and a half over a sticky, muddy road, Bolkhovítinov reached Litashëvka after one o'clock at night. Dismounting at a cottage on whose wattle fence hung a signboard, GENERAL STAFF, and throwing down his reins, he entered a dark passage.

"The general on duty, quick! It's very important!" said he to someone who had risen and was sniffing in the dark passage.

"He has been very unwell since the evening and this is the third night he has not slept," said the orderly pleadingly in a whisper. "You should wake the captain first."

"But this is very important, from General Dokhtúrov," said Bolkhovítinov, entering the open door which he had found by feeling in the dark.

The orderly had gone in before him and began waking somebody.

"Your honor, your honor! A courier."

"What? What's that? From whom?" came a sleepy voice.

"From Dokhtúrov and from Alexéy Petróvich. Napoleon is at Formínsk," said Bolkhovítinov, unable to see in the dark who was speaking but guessing by the voice that it was not Konovnítsyn.

The man who had wakened yawned and stretched himself.

"I don't like waking him," he said, fumbling for something. "He is very ill. Perhaps this is only a rumor."

"Here is the dispatch," said Bolkhovítinov. "My orders are to give it at once to the general on duty."

"Wait a moment, I'll light a candle. You damned rascal, where do you always hide it?" said the voice of the man who was stretching himself, to the orderly. (This was Shcherbínin, Konovnítsyn's adjutant.) "I've found it, I've found it!" he added.

The orderly was striking a light and Shcherbínin was fumbling for something on the candlestick.

"Oh, the nasty beasts!" said he with disgust.

By the light of the sparks Bolkhovítinov saw Shcherbínin's youthful face as he held the candle, and the face of another man who was still asleep. This was Konovnítsyn.

When the flame of the sulphur splinters kindled by the tinder burned

up, first blue and then red, Shcherbínin lit the tallow candle, from the candlestick of which the cockroaches that had been gnawing it were running away, and looked at the messenger. Bolkhovítinov was bespattered all over with mud and had smeared his face by wiping it with his sleeve.

“Who gave the report?” inquired Shcherbínin, taking the envelope.

“The news is reliable,” said Bolkhovítinov. “Prisoners, Cossacks, and the scouts all say the same thing.”

“There’s nothing to be done, we’ll have to wake him,” said Shcherbínin, rising and going up to the man in the nightcap who lay covered by a greatcoat. “Peter Petróvich!” said he. (Konovnítsyn did not stir.) “To the General Staff!” he said with a smile, knowing that those words would be sure to arouse him.

And in fact the head in the nightcap was lifted at once. On Konovnítsyn’s handsome, resolute face with cheeks flushed by fever, there still remained for an instant a faraway dreamy expression remote from present affairs, but then he suddenly started and his face assumed its habitual calm and firm appearance.

“Well, what is it? From whom?” he asked immediately but without hurry, blinking at the light.

While listening to the officer’s report Konovnítsyn broke the seal and read the dispatch. Hardly had he done so before he lowered his legs in their woolen stockings to the earthen floor and began putting on his boots. Then he took off his nightcap, combed his hair over his temples, and donned his cap.

“Did you get here quickly? Let us go to his Highness.”

Konovnítsyn had understood at once that the news brought was of great importance and that no time must be lost. He did not consider or ask himself whether the news was good or bad. That did not interest him. He regarded the whole business of the war not with his intelligence or his reason but by something else. There was within him a deep unexpressed conviction that all would be well, but that one must not trust to this and still less speak about it, but must only attend to one’s own work. And he did his work, giving his whole strength to the task.

Peter Petróvich Konovnítsyn, like Dokhtúrov, seems to have been included merely for propriety’s sake in the list of the so-called heroes of 1812—the Barclays, Raévskis, Ermólovs, Plátovs, and Milorádoviches. Like Dokhtúrov he had the reputation of being a man of very limited capacity and information, and like Dokhtúrov he never made plans of battle but was always found where the situation was most difficult. Since his appointment as general on duty he had always slept with his door open, giving orders that every messenger should be allowed to wake him up. In battle he was always under fire, so that Kutúzov reproved him for it and feared to send him to the front, and like Dokhtúrov he was one of those unnoticed cogwheels that, without clatter or noise, constitute the most essential part of the machine.

Coming out of the hut into the damp, dark night Konovnítsyn frowned—partly from an increased pain in his head and partly at the unpleasant thought that occurred to him, of how all that nest of influential men on the staff would be stirred up by this news, especially Bennigsen, who ever since Tarútino had been at daggers drawn with Kutúzov; and how they would make suggestions, quarrel, issue orders, and rescind them. And this premonition was disagreeable to him though he knew it could not be helped.

And in fact Toll, to whom he went to communicate the news, immediately began to expound his plans to a general sharing his quarters, until Konovnítsyn, who listened in weary silence, reminded him that they must go to see his Highness.