HENTY GEORGE ALFRED

WITH FREDERICK THE GREAT: A STORY OF THE SEVEN YEARS' WAR

George Henty

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Содержание

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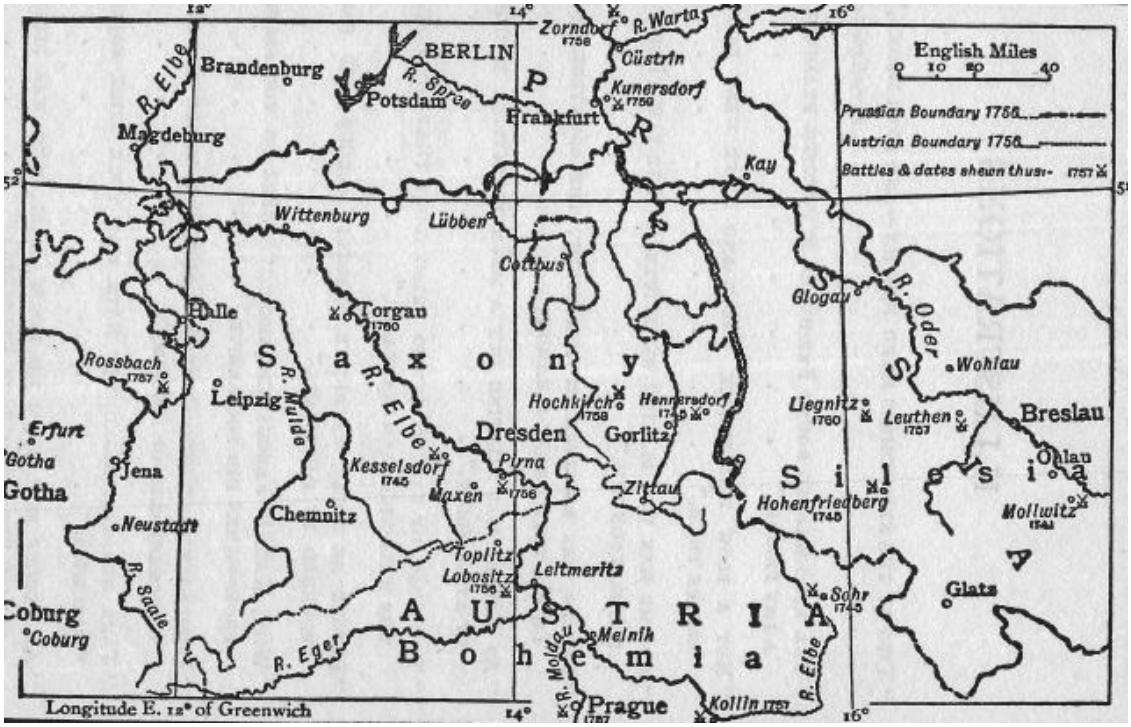
Preface



Among the great wars of history there are few, if any, instances of so long and successfully sustained a struggle, against enormous odds, as that of the Seven Years' War, maintained by Prussia–then a small and comparatively insignificant kingdom–against Russia, Austria, and France simultaneously, who were aided also by the forces of most of the minor principalities of Germany. The population of Prussia was not more than five millions, while that of the Allies considerably exceeded a hundred millions. Prussia could put, with the greatest efforts, but a hundred and fifty thousand men into the field, and as these were exhausted she had but small reserves to draw upon; while the Allies could, with comparatively little difficulty, put five hundred thousand men into the field, and replenish them as there was occasion. That the struggle was successfully carried on, for seven years, was due chiefly to the military genius of the king; to his indomitable perseverance; and to a resolution that no disaster could shake, no situation, although apparently hopeless, appall. Something was due also, at the commencement of the war, to the splendid discipline of the Prussian army at that time; but as comparatively few of those who fought at Lobositz could have stood in the ranks at Torgau, the quickness of the Prussian people to acquire military discipline must have been great; and this was aided by the perfect confidence they felt in their king, and the enthusiasm with which he inspired them.

Although it was not, nominally, a war for religion, the consequences were as great and important as those which arose from the Thirty Years' War. Had Prussia been crushed and divided, Protestantism would have disappeared in Germany, and the whole course of subsequent events would have been changed. The war was scarcely less important to Britain than to Prussia. Our close

connection with Hanover brought us into the fray; and the weakening of France, by her efforts against Prussia, enabled us to wrest Canada from her, to crush her rising power in India, and to obtain that absolute supremacy at sea that we have never, since, lost. And yet, while every school boy knows of the battles of ancient Greece, not one in a hundred has any knowledge whatever of the momentous struggle in Germany, or has ever as much as heard the names of the memorable battles of Rossbach, Leuthen, Prague, Zorndorf, Hochkirch, and Torgau. Carlyle's great work has done much to familiarize older readers with the story; but its bulk, its fullness of detail, and still more the peculiarity of Carlyle's diction and style, place it altogether out of the category of books that can be read and enjoyed by boys.

I have therefore endeavoured to give the outlines of the struggle, for their benefit; but regret that, in a story so full of great events, I have necessarily been obliged to devote a smaller share than usual to the doings of my hero.

G. A. Henty.

Chapter 1: King and Marshal

It was early in 1756 that a Scottish trader, from Edinburgh, entered the port of Stettin. Among the few passengers was a tall young Scotch lad, Fergus Drummond by name. Though scarcely sixteen, he stood five feet ten in height; and it was evident, from his broad shoulders and sinewy appearance, that his strength was in full proportion to his height. His father had fallen at Culloden, ten years before. The glens had been harried by Cumberland's soldiers, and the estates confiscated. His mother had fled with him to the hills; and had lived there, for some years, in the cottage of a faithful clansman, whose wife had been her nurse. Fortunately, they were sufficiently well off to be able to maintain their guests in comfort; and indeed the presents of game, fish, and other matters, frequently sent in by other members of the clan, had enabled her to feel that her maintenance was no great burden on her faithful friends.

For some years, she devoted herself to her son's education; and then, through the influence of friends at court, she obtained the grant of a small portion of her late husband's estates; and was able to live in comfort, in a position more suited to her former rank.

Fergus' life had been passed almost entirely in the open air. Accompanied by one or two companions, sons of the clansmen, he would start soon after daybreak and not return until sunset, when they would often bring back a deer from the forests, or a heavy creel of salmon or trout from the streams. His mother encouraged him in these excursions, and also in the practice of arms. She confined her lessons to the evening, and even after she settled on her recovered farm of Kilgowrie, and obtained the services of a tutor for him, she arranged that he should still be permitted to pass the greater part of the day according to his own devices.

She herself was a cousin of the two brothers Keith; the one of whom, then Lord Marischal, had proclaimed the Old Pretender king at Edinburgh; and both of whom had attained very high rank abroad, the younger Keith having served with great distinction in the Spanish and Russian armies, and had then taken service under Frederick the Great, from whom he had received the rank of field marshal, and was the king's greatest counsellor and friend. His brother had joined him there, and stood equally high in the king's favour. Although both were devoted Jacobites, and had risked all, at the first rising in favour of the Old Pretender, neither had taken part in that of Charles Edward, seeing that it was doomed to failure. After Culloden, James Keith, the field marshal, had written to his cousin, Mrs. Drummond, as follows:

"Dear Cousin,

"I have heard with grief from Alexander Grahame, who has come over here to escape the troubles, of the grievous loss that has befallen you. He tells me that, when in hiding among the mountains, he learned that you had, with your boy, taken refuge with Ian the forester, whom I well remember when I was last staying with your good husband, Sir John. He also said that your estates had been confiscated, but that he was sure you would be well cared for by your clansmen. Grahame told me that he stayed with you for a few hours, while he was flying from Cumberland's bloodhounds; and that you told him you intended to remain there, and to devote yourself to the boy's education, until better times came.

"I doubt not that ere long, when the hot blood that has been stirred up by this rising has cooled down somewhat, milder measures will be used, and some mercy be shown; but it may be long, for the Hanoverian has been badly frightened, and the Whigs throughout the country greatly scared, and this for the second time. I am no lover of the usurper, but I cannot agree with all that has been said about the severity of the punishment that has been dealt out. I have been fighting all over Europe, and I know of no country where a heavy reckoning would not have been made, after so serious an insurrection. Men who take up arms against a king know that they are staking their lives; but after

vengeance comes pardon, and the desire to heal wounds, and I trust that you will get some portion of your estate again.

"It is early yet to think of what you are going to make of the boy, but I am sure you will not want to see him fighting in the Hanoverian uniform. So, if he has a taste for adventure let him, when the time comes, make his way out to me; or if I should be under the sod by that time, let him go to my brother. There will, methinks, be no difficulty in finding out where we are, for there are so many Scotch abroad that news of us must often come home. However, from time to time I will write to you. Do not expect to hear too often, for I spend far more time in the saddle than at my table, and my fingers are more accustomed to grasp a sword than a pen. However, be sure that wherever I may be, I shall be glad to see your son, and to do my best for him.

"See that he is not brought up at your apron string, but is well trained in all exercises; for we Scots have gained a great name for strength and muscle, and I would not that one of my kin should fall short of the mark."

Maggie Drummond had been much pleased with her kinsman's letter. There were few Scotchmen who stood higher in the regard of their countrymen, and the two Keiths had also a European reputation. Her husband, and many other fiery spirits, had expressed surprise and even indignation that the brothers, who had taken so prominent a part in the first rising, should not have hastened to join Prince Charlie; but the more thoughtful men felt it was a bad omen that they did not do so. It was certainly not from any want of adventurous spirit, or of courage, for wherever adventures were to be obtained, wherever blows were most plentiful, James Keith and his brother were certain to be in the midst of them.

But Maggie Drummond knew the reason for their holding aloof; for she had, shortly before the coming over of Prince Charlie, received a short note from the field marshal:

"They say that Prince Charles Edward is meditating a mad scheme of crossing to Scotland, and raising his standard there. If so, do what you can to prevent your husband from joining him. We made but a poor hand of it, last time; and the chances of success are vastly smaller now. Then it was but a comparatively short time since the Stuarts had lost the throne of England, and there were great numbers who wished them back. Now the Hanoverian is very much more firmly seated on the throne. The present man has a considerable army, and the troops have had experience of war on the Continent, and have shown themselves rare soldiers. Were not my brother Lord Marischal of Scotland, and my name somewhat widely known, I should not hang back from the adventure, however desperate; but our example might lead many who might otherwise stand aloof to take up arms, which would bring, I think, sure destruction upon them. Therefore we shall restrain our own inclinations, and shall watch what I feel sure will be a terrible tragedy, from a distance; striking perhaps somewhat heavier blows than usual upon the heads of Turks, Moors, Frenchmen, and others, to make up for our not being able to use our swords where our inclinations would lead us.

"The King of France will assuredly give no efficient aid to the Stuarts. He has all along used them as puppets, by whose means he can, when he chooses, annoy or coerce England. But I have no belief that he will render any useful aid, either now or hereafter.

"Use then, cousin, all your influence to keep Drummond at home. Knowing him as I do, I have no great hope that it will avail; for I know that he is Jacobite to the backbone, and that, if the Prince lands, he will be one of the first to join him."

Maggie had not carried out Keith's injunction. She had indeed told her husband, when she received the letter, that Keith believed the enterprise to be so hopeless a one that he should not join in it. But she was as ardent in the cause of the Stuarts as was her husband, and said no single word to deter him when, an hour after he heard the news of the prince's landing, he mounted and rode off to meet him, and to assure him that he would bring every man of his following to the spot where his adherents were to assemble. From time to time his widow had continued to write to Keith; though, owing to his being continually engaged on campaigns against the Turks and Tartars, he received

but two or three of her letters, so long as he remained in the service of Russia. When, however, he displeased the Empress Elizabeth, and at once left the service and entered that of Prussia, her letters again reached him.

The connection between France and Scotland had always been close, and French was a language familiar to most of the upper class; and since the civil troubles began, such numbers of Scottish gentlemen were forced either to shelter in France, or to take service in the French or other foreign armies, that a knowledge of the language became almost a matter of necessity. In one of his short letters Keith had told her that, of all things, it was necessary that the lad should speak French with perfect fluency, and master as much German as possible. And it was to these points that his education had been almost entirely directed.

As to French there was no difficulty and, when she recovered a portion of the estate, Maggie Drummond was lucky in hearing of a Hanoverian trooper who, having been wounded and left behind in Glasgow, his term of service having expired, had on his recovery married the daughter of the woman who had nursed him. He was earning a somewhat precarious living by giving lessons in the use of the rapier, and in teaching German; and gladly accepted the offer to move out to Kilgowrie, where he was established in a cottage close to the house, where his wife aided in the housework. He became a companion of Fergus in his walks and rambles and, being an honest and pleasant fellow, the lad took to him; and after a few months their conversation, at first somewhat disjointed, became easy and animated. He learned, too, much from him as to the use of his sword. The Scotch clansmen used their claymores chiefly for striking; but under Rudolph's tuition the lad came to be as apt with the point as he had before been with the edge, and fully recognized the great advantages of the former. By the time he reached the age of sixteen, his skill with the weapon was fully recognized by the young clansmen who, on occasions of festive gatherings, sometimes came up to try their skill with the young laird.

From Rudolph, too, he came to know a great deal of the affairs of Europe, as to which he had hitherto been profoundly ignorant. He learned how, by the capture of the province of Silesia from the Empress of Austria, the King of Prussia had, from a minor principality, raised his country to a considerable power, and was regarded with hostility and jealousy by all his neighbours.

"But it is only a small territory now, Rudolph," Fergus said.

"'Tis small, Master Fergus, but the position is a very strong one. Silesia cannot well be invaded, save by an army forcing its way through very formidable defiles; while on the other hand, the Prussian forces can suddenly pour out into Saxony or Hanover. Prussia has perhaps the best-drilled army in Europe, and though its numbers are small in proportion to those which Austria can put in the field, they are a compact force; while the Austrian army is made up of many peoples, and could not be gathered with the speed with which Frederick could place his force in the field.

"The king, too, is himself, above all things, a soldier. He has good generals, and his troops are devoted to him, though the discipline is terribly strict. It is a pity that he and the King of England are not good friends. They are natural allies, both countries being Protestant; and to say the truth, we in Hanover should be well pleased to see them make common cause together, and should feel much more comfortable with Prussia as our friend than as a possible enemy.

"However, 'tis not likely that, at present, Prussia will turn her hand against us. I hear, by letters from home, that it is said that the Empress of Russia, as well as the Empress of Austria, both hate Frederick; the latter because he has stolen Silesia from her; the former because he has openly said things about her such as a woman never forgives. Saxony and Poland are jealous of him, and France none too well disposed. So at present the King of Prussia is like to leave his neighbours alone; for he may need to draw his sword, at any time, in self defence."

It was but a few days after this that Maggie Drummond received this short letter from her cousin, Marshal James Keith:

"My dear Cousin,

"By your letter, received a few days since, I learned that Fergus is now nearly sixteen years old; and is, you say, as well grown and strong as many lads two or three years older. Therefore it is as well that you should send him off to me, at once. There are signs in the air that we shall shortly have stirring times, and the sooner he is here the better. I would send money for his outfit; but as your letter tells me that you have, by your economies, saved a sum ample for this purpose, I abstain from doing so. Let him come straight to Berlin, and inquire for me at the palace. I have a suite of apartments there; and he could not have a better time for entering upon military service; nor a better master than the king, who loves his Scotchmen, and under whom he is like to find opportunity to distinguish himself."

A week later, Fergus started. It needed an heroic effort, on the part of his mother, to let him go from her; but she had, all along, recognized that it was for the best that he should leave her. That he should grow up as a petty laird, where his ancestors had been the owners of wide estates, and were powerful chiefs with a large following of clansmen and retainers, was not to be thought of. Scotland offered few openings, especially to those belonging to Jacobite families; and it was therefore deemed the natural course, for a young man of spirit, to seek his fortune abroad and, from the days of the Union, there was scarcely a foreign army that did not contain a considerable contingent of Scottish soldiers and officers. They formed nearly a third of the army of Gustavus Adolphus, and the service of the Protestant princes of Germany had always been popular among them.

Then, her own cousin being a marshal in the Prussian army, it seemed to Mrs. Drummond almost a matter of course, when the time came, that Fergus should go to him; and she had, for many years, devoted herself to preparing the lad for that service. Nevertheless, now that the time had come, she felt the parting no less sorely; but she bore up well, and the sudden notice kept her fully occupied with preparations, till the hour came for his departure.

Two of the men rode with him as far as Leith, and saw him on board ship. Rudolph had volunteered to accompany him as servant, but his mother had said to the lad:

"It would be better not, Fergus. Of course you will have a soldier servant, there, and there might be difficulties in having a civilian with you."

It was, however, arranged that Rudolph should become a member of the household. Being a handy fellow, a fair carpenter, and ready to turn his hand to anything, there would be no difficulty in making him useful about the farm.

Fergus had learnt, from him, the price at which he ought to be able to buy a useful horse; and his first step, after landing at Stettin and taking up his quarters at an inn, was to inquire the address of a horse dealer. The latter found, somewhat to his surprise, that the young Scot was a fair judge of a horse, and a close hand at driving a bargain; and when he left, the lad had the satisfaction of knowing that he was the possessor of a serviceable animal, and one which, by its looks, would do him no discredit.

Three days later he rode into Berlin. He dismounted at a quiet inn, changed his travelling dress for the new one that he carried in his valise, and then, after inquiring for the palace, made his way there.

He was struck by the number of soldiers in the streets, and with the neatness, and indeed almost stiffness, of their uniform and bearing. Each man walked as if on parade, and the eye of the strictest martinet could not have detected a speck of dust on their equipment, or an ill-adjusted strap or buckle.

"I hope they do not brace and tie up their officers in that style," Fergus said to himself.

He himself had always been accustomed to a loose and easy attire, suitable for mountain work; and the high cravats and stiff collars, powdered heads and pigtails, and tight-fitting garments, seemed to him the acme of discomfort. It was not long, however, before he came upon a group of officers, and saw that the military etiquette was no less strict, in their case, than in that of the soldiers, save that their collars were less high, and their stocks more easy. Their walk, too, was somewhat less automatic

and machine-like, but they were certainly in strong contrast to the British officers he had seen, on the occasions of his one or two visits to Perth.

On reaching the palace, and saying that he wished to see Marshal Keith, he was conducted by a soldier to his apartment; and on the former taking in the youth's name, he was at once admitted. The marshal rose from his chair, came forward, and shook him heartily by the hand.

"So you are Fergus Drummond," he said, "the son of my cousin Maggie! Truly she lost no time in sending you off, after she got my letter. I was afraid she might be long before she could bring herself to part from you."

"She had made up her mind to it so long, sir, that she was prepared for it; and indeed, I think that she did her best to hurry me off as soon as possible, not only because your letter was somewhat urgent, but because it gave her less time to think."

"That was right and sensible, lad, as indeed Maggie always was, from a child.

"She did not speak too strongly about you, for indeed I should have taken you for fully two years older than you are. You have lost no time in growing, lad, and if you lose no more in climbing, you will not be long before you are well up the tree.

"Now, sit you down, and let me first hear all about your mother, and how she fares."

"In the first place, sir, she charged me to give you her love and affection, and to thank you for your good remembrance of her, and for writing to her so often, when you must have had so many other matters on your mind."

"I was right glad when I heard that they had given her back Kilgowrie. It is but a corner of your father's lands; but I remember the old house well, going over there once, when I was staying with your grandfather, to see his mother, who was then living there. How much land goes with it?"

"About a thousand acres, but the greater part is moor and mountain. Still, the land suffices for her to live on, seeing that she keeps up no show, and lives as quietly as if she had never known anything better."

"Aye, she was ever of a contented spirit. I mind her, when she was a tiny child; if no one would play with her, she would sit by the hour talking with her dolls, till someone could spare time to perch her on his shoulder, and take her out."

Marshal Keith was a tall man, with a face thoughtful in repose, but having a pleasant smile, and an eye that lit up with quiet humour when he spoke. He enjoyed the king's confidence to the fullest extent, and was regarded by him not only as a general in whose sagacity and skill he could entirely rely, but as one on whose opinion he could trust upon all political questions. He was his favourite companion when, as happened not unfrequently, he donned a disguise and went about the town, listening to the talk of the citizens and learning their opinions upon public affairs.

"I have spoken to the king about your coming, lad, and told him that you were a kinsman of mine.

"'Indeed, marshal,' the king said, 'from what I can see, it appears to me that all Scotchmen are more or less kin to each other.'

"'It is so to some extent, your majesty. We Scotchmen pride ourselves on genealogy, and know every marriage that has taken place, for ages past, between the members of our family and those of others; and claim as kin, even though very distant, all those who have any of our blood running in their veins. But in this case the kinship is close, the lad's mother being a first cousin of mine. His father was killed at Culloden, and I promised her, as soon as the news came to me, that when he had grown up strong and hearty he should join me, wherever I might be, and should have a chance of making his fortune by his sword.'

"'You say that he speaks both French and German well? It is more than I can do,' the king said with a laugh. 'German born and German king as I am, I get on but badly when I try my native tongue, for from a child I have spoken nothing but French. Still, it is well that he should know the language.

In my case it matters but little, seeing that all my court and all my generals speak French. But one who has to give orders to soldiers should be understood by them.

"'Well, what do you want me to do for the lad?'

"'I propose to make him one of my own aides-de-camp,' I replied, 'and therefore I care not so much to what regiment he is appointed; though I own that I would far rather see him in the uniform of the guards, than any other.'

"'You are modest, marshal; but I observe that it is a common fault among your countrymen. Well, which shall it be–infantry or cavalry?'

"'Cavalry, since you are good enough to give me the choice, sire. The uniform looks better, for an aide-de-camp, than that of the infantry.'

"'Very well, then, you may consider him gazetted as a cornet, in my third regiment of Guards. You have no more kinsmen coming at present, Keith?'

"'No, sire; not at present.'

"'If many more come, I shall form them into a separate regiment.'

"'Your majesty might do worse,' I said.

"The king nodded. 'I wish I had half a dozen Scotch regiments; aye, a score or two. They were the cream of the army of Gustavus Adolphus, and if matters turn out as I fear they will, it would be a welcome reinforcement.'

"I will give you a note presently," continued the marshal, "to a man who makes my uniforms, so that I may present you to the king, as soon as you are enrolled. You must remember that your favour, or otherwise, with him will depend very largely upon the fit of your uniform, and the manner in which you carry yourself. There is nothing so unpardonable, in his eyes, as a slovenly and ill-fitting dress. Everything must be correct, to a nicety, under all circumstances. Even during hot campaigns, you must turn out in the morning as if you came from a band box.

"I will get Colonel Grunow, who commands your regiment, to tell off an old trooper, one who is thoroughly up to his work, as your servant. I doubt not that he may be even able to find you a Scotchman, for there are many in the ranks–gentlemen who came over after Culloden, and hundreds of brave fellows who escaped Cumberland's harryings by taking ship and coming over here, where, as they supposed, they would fight under a Protestant king."

"But the king is a Protestant, is he not, sir?"

"He is nominally a Protestant, Fergus. Absolutely, his majesty has so many things to see about that he does not trouble himself greatly about religion. I should say that he was a disciple of Voltaire, until Voltaire came here; when, upon acquaintance, he saw through the vanity of the little Frenchman, and has been much less enthusiastic about him since.

"By the way, how did you come here?"

"We heard of a ship sailing for Stettin, and that hurried my departure by some days. I made a good voyage there, and on landing bought a horse and rode here."

"Well, I am afraid your horse won't do to carry one of my aides-de-camp, so you had best dispose of it, for what it will fetch. I will mount you myself. His majesty was pleased to give me two horses, the other day, and my stable is therefore over full.

"Now, Fergus, we will drink a goblet of wine to your new appointment, and success to your career."

"From what you said in your letter to my mother, sir, you think it likely that we shall see service, before long?"

"Aye, lad, and desperate service, too. We have–but mind, this must go no further–sure news that Russia, Austria, France, and Saxony have formed a secret league against Prussia, and that they intend to crush us first, and then partition the kingdom among themselves. The Empress of Austria has shamelessly denied that any such treaty exists, but tomorrow morning a messenger will start, with a demand from the king that the treaty shall be publicly acknowledged and then broken off, or that

he will at once proclaim war. If we say nine days for the journey there, nine days to return, and three days waiting for the answer, you see that in three weeks from the present we may be on the move, for our only chance depends upon striking a heavy blow before they are ready. We have not wasted our time. The king has already made an alliance with England."

"But England has no troops, or scarcely any," Fergus said.

"No, lad, but she has what is of quite as much importance in war–namely, money, and she can grant us a large subsidy. The king's interest in the matter is almost as great as ours. He is a Hanoverian more than an Englishman, and you may be sure that, if Prussia were to be crushed, the allies would make but a single bite of Hanover. You see, this will be a war of life and death to us, and the fighting will be hard and long."

"But what grievance has France against the king?"

"His majesty is open spoken, and no respecter of persons; and a woman may forgive an injury, but never a scornful gibe. It is this that has brought both France and Russia on him. Madame Pompadour, who is all powerful, hates Frederick for having made disrespectful remarks concerning her. The Empress of Russia detests him, for the same reason. She of Austria has a better cause, for she has never forgiven the loss of Silesia; and it is the enmity of these women, as much as the desire to partition Prussia, that is about to plunge Europe into a war to the full as terrible as that of the thirty years."

Keith now rung a bell, and a soldier entered.

"Tell Lieutenant Lindsay that I wish to speak to him."

A minute later an officer entered the room, and saluted stiffly.

"Lindsay, this is a young cousin of mine, Fergus Drummond. The king has appointed him to a cornetcy in the 3rd Royal Dragoon Guards, but he is going to be one of my aides-de-camp. Now that things are beginning to move, you and Gordon will need help.

"Take him first to Tautz. I have written a note to the man, telling him that he must hurry everything on. There is still a spare room on your corridor, is there not? Get your man to see his things bestowed there. I shall get his appointment this evening, I expect, but it will be a day or two before he will be able to get a soldier from his regiment. He has a horse to sell, and various other matters to see to. At any rate, look after him, till tomorrow. 'Tis my hour to go to the king."

Lindsay was a young man of two or three and twenty. He had a merry, joyous face, a fine figure, and a good carriage; but until he and Fergus were beyond the limits of the palace, he walked by the lad's side with scarce a word. When once past the entrance, however, he gave a sigh of relief.

"Now, Drummond," he said, "we will shake hands, and begin to make each other's acquaintance. First, I am Nigel Lindsay, very much at your service. On duty I am another person altogether, scarcely recognizable even by myself–a sort of wooden machine, ready, when a button is touched, to bring my heels smartly together, and my hand to the salute. There is something in the air that stiffens one's backbone, and freezes one from the tip of one's toes to the end of one's pigtail. When one is with the marshal alone, one thaws; for there is no better fellow living, and he chats to us as if we were on a mountain side in Scotland, instead of in Frederick's palace. But one is always being interrupted; either a general, or a colonel, or possibly the king himself, comes in.

"For the time, one becomes a military statue; and even when they go, it is difficult to take up the talk as it was left. Oh, it is wearisome work, and heartily glad I shall be, when the trumpets blow and we march out of Berlin. However, we are beginning to be pretty busy. I have been on horseback, twelve hours a day on an average, for the past week. Gordon started yesterday for Magdeburg, and Macgregor has been two days absent, but I don't know where. Everyone is busy, from the king himself–who is always busy about something–to the youngest drummer. Nobody outside a small circle knows what it is all about. Apparently we are in a state of profound peace, without a cloud in the sky, and yet the military preparations are going on actively, everywhere.

"Convoys of provisions are being sent to the frontier fortresses. Troops are in movement from the Northern Provinces. Drilling is going on–I was going to say night and day, for it is pretty nearly that–and no one can make out what it is all about.

"There is one thing–no one asks questions. His majesty thinks for his subjects, and as he certainly is the cleverest man in his dominions, everyone is well content that it should be so.

"And now, about yourself. I am running on and talking nonsense, when I have all sorts of questions to ask you. But that is always the way with me. I am like a bottle of champagne, corked down while I am in the palace, and directly I get away the cork flies out by itself, and for a minute or two it is all froth and emptiness.

"Now, when did you arrive, how did you arrive, what is the last news from Scotland, which of the branches of the Drummonds do you belong to, and how near of kin are you to the marshal? Oh, by the way, I ought to know the last without asking; as you are a Drummond, and a relation of Keith, you can be no other than the son of the Drummond of Tarbet, who married Margaret Ogilvie, who was a first cousin of Keith's."

"That is right," Fergus said. "My father fell at Culloden, you know. As to all your other questions, they are answered easily enough. I know very little of the news in Scotland, for my mother lived a very secluded life at Kilgowrie, and little news came to us from without. I came from Leith to Stettin, and there I bought a horse and rode on here."

His companion laughed.

"And how about yourself? I suppose you know nothing of this beastly language?"

"Yes; I can speak it pretty fluently, and of course know French."

"I congratulate you, though how you learnt it, up in the hills, I know not. I did not know a word of it, when I came out two years ago; and it is always on my mind, for of course I have a master who, when I am not otherwise engaged, comes to me for an hour a day, and well nigh maddens me with his crack-jaw words; but I don't seem to make much progress. If I am sent with an order, and the officer to whom I take it does not understand French, I am floored. Of course I hand the order, if it is a written one, to him. If it is not, but just some verbal message, asking him to call on the marshal at such and such a time, I generally make a horrible mess of it. He gets in a rage with me, because he cannot understand me. I get in a rage with him, for his dulness; and were it not that he generally manages to find some other officer, who does understand French, the chances are very strongly against Keith's message being attended to.

"First of all, I will take you to our quarters. That is the house."

"Why, I thought you lodged in the palace?"

"Heaven forbid! Macgregor has a room in the chief's suite of apartments. He is senior aide-de-camp, and if there is any message to be sent late, he takes it; but that is not often the case. Gordon lodges here with me. The house is a sort of branch establishment to the palace. Malcolm Menzies and Horace Farquhar, two junior aides of the king, are in the same corridor with us. Of course we make up a party by ourselves. Then there are ten or twelve German officers–some of them aides-de-camp of the Princes Maurice and Henry, the Prince of Bevern and General Schwerin–besides a score or so of palace officials.

"Fortunately the Scotch corridor, as we call it, has a separate entrance, so we can go in or out without disturbing anyone. It is a good thing, for in fact we and the Prussians do not get on very well together. They have a sort of jealousy of us; which is, I suppose, natural enough. Foreigners are never favourites, and George's Hanoverian officers are not greatly loved in London. I expect a campaign will do good, that way. They will see, at any rate, that we don't take our pay for nothing, and are ready to do a full share and more of fighting; while we shall find that these stiff pipe-clayed figures are brave fellows, and good comrades, when they get a little of the starch washed out of them.

"Now, this is my room, and I see my man has got dinner ready."

Chapter 2: Joining

In answer to the shout of "Donald," a tall man in the pantaloons of a Prussian regiment, but with his tunic laid aside, came out from a small room that served as a kitchen, and dormitory, for himself.

"I am just ready, sir," he said. "Hearing you talking as you came along, and not knowing who you might have with you, I just ran in to put on my coat; but as you passed, and I heard it was Scottish you were speaking, I knew that it didna matter."

"Put another plate and goblet on the table, Donald. I hope that you have meat enough for two of us."

"Plenty for four," the soldier said. "The market was full this morning, and the folk so ta'en up wi' this talk of war, and so puzzled because no one could mak' out what it was about, that they did more gossiping than marketing. So when the time came for the market to close, I got half a young pig at less than I should hae paid for a joint, as the woman did not want to carry it home again."

"That is lucky. As you are from Perth, Donald, it is possible you may know this gentleman. He is Mr. Fergus Drummond, of Tarbet."

"I kenned his father weel; aye, and was close beside him at Culloden, for when our company was broken I joined one that was making a stand, close by, and it was Drummond who was leading it. Stoutly did we fight, and to the end stood back to back, hewing with our claymores at their muskets.

"At last I fell, wounded, I couldna say where at the time. When I came to myself and, finding that all was quiet, sat up and felt myself over, I found that it was a musket bullet that had ploughed along the top of my head, and would ha' killed me had it not been that my skull was, as my father had often said when I was a boy, thicker than ordinary. There were dead men lying all about me; but it was a dark night, and as there was no time to be lost if I was to save my skin, I crawled away to some distance from the field; and then took to my heels, and did not stop till next morning, when I was far away among the hills."

While he was talking, Donald had been occupied in adding a second plate and knife and fork and glass, and the two officers sat down to their meal. Fergus asked the soldier other questions as to the fight in which his father had lost his life; for beyond that he had fought to the last with his face to the foe, the lad had never learnt any particulars, for of the clansmen who had accompanied his father not one had ever returned.

"Mr. Drummond will take the empty room next to mine, Donald. I am going down now with him, to the inn where he has left his horse. As he has a few things there, you had best come with us and bring them here."

The landlord of the inn, on hearing that Fergus wished to sell his horse, said that there were two travellers in the house who had asked him about horses; as both had sold, to officers, fine animals they had brought in from the country, there being at present a great demand for horses of that class. One of these persons came in as they were speaking, and after a little bargaining Fergus sold the horse to him, at a small advance on the price he had given for it at Stettin. The landlord himself bought the saddle and bridle, for a few marks; saying that he could, at any time, find a customer for such matters. Donald took the valises and cloak, and carried them back to the palace.

"That matter is all comfortably settled," Lindsay said. "Now we are free men, but my liberty won't last long. I shall have to go on duty again, in half an hour. But at any rate, there is time to go first with you to the tailor's, and put your uniform in hand."

"I wish to be measured for the uniform of the 3rd Royal Dragoon Guards," Fergus said, as he entered the shop and the proprietor came up to him.

"Yes, Herr Tautz; and his excellency, Marshal Keith," Lindsay put in, "wishes you to know that the dress suit must be made instantly, or quicker if possible; for his majesty may, at any moment, order Mr. Drummond to attend upon him. Mr. Drummond is appointed one of the marshal's aides-

de-camp; and as, therefore, he will often come under the king's eye, you may well believe that the fit must be of the best, or you are likely to hear of it, as well as Mr. Drummond."

"I will put it in hand at once, lieutenant. It shall be cut out without delay; and in three hours, if Mr. Drummond will call here, it shall be tacked together in readiness for the first trying on. By eight o'clock tomorrow morning it shall be ready to be properly fitted, and unless my men have bungled, which they very seldom do, it shall be delivered by midday."

"Mr. Drummond lodges in the next room to myself," the lieutenant said; "and my servant is looking after him, till he gets one of his own, so you can leave it with him."

While the conversation was going on, two of the assistants were measuring Fergus.

"Will you have the uniform complete, with belts, helmet, and all equipments?"

"Everything except the sword," Fergus said.

"At least I suppose, Lindsay, we can carry our own swords."

"Yes, the king has made that concession, which is a wonderful one, for him, that Scottish officers in his service may carry their own swords. You see, ours are longer and straighter than the German ones, and most of us have learnt our exercises with them, and certainly we would not fight so well with others; besides, the iron basket protects one's hand and wrist vastly better than the foreign guard. The concession was first made only to generals, field officers and aides-de-camp; but Keith persuaded the king, at last, to grant it to all Scottish officers, pointing out that they were able to do much better service with their own claymores, than with weapons to which they were altogether unaccustomed; and that Scottish men were accustomed to fight with the edge, and to strike downright sweeping blows, whereas the swords here are fitted only for the point, which, although doubtless superior in a duel, is far less effective in a general melee."

"I should certainly be sorry to give up my own sword," Fergus said. "It was one of my father's, and since the days when I was big enough to begin to use it, I have always exercised myself with it; though I, too, have learned to use the point a great deal, as I had a German instructor, as well as several Scottish ones."

"Except in a duel," Lindsay said, "I should doubt if skill goes for very much. I have never tried it myself, for I have never had the luck to be in battle; but I fancy that in a cavalry charge strength goes for more than skill, and the man who can strike quickly and heavily will do more execution than one trained to all sorts of nice points and feints. I grant that these are useful, when two men are watching each other; but in the heat of a battle, when every one is cutting and thrusting for his life, I cannot think that there is any time for fooling about with your weapon."

They had by this time left the shop, and were strolling down the streets.

"Is there much duelling here?"

"It is strictly forbidden," Lindsay said, with a laugh; "but I need hardly say that there is a good deal of it. Of course, pains are taken that these affairs do not come to his majesty's ears. Fever, or a fall from a horse, account satisfactorily enough for the absence of an officer from parade, and even his total disappearance from the scene can be similarly explained. Should the affair come to the king's ears, 'tis best to keep out of his way until it has blown over.

"Of course, with us it does not matter quite so much as with Prussian officers. Frederick's is not the only service open to us. Good swords are welcome either at the Russian or Austrian courts, to say nothing of those of half a dozen minor principalities. At all of these we are sure to find countrymen and friends, and if England really enters upon the struggle–and it seems to me that if there is a general row she can scarcely stand aloof–men who have learned their drill and seen some service might be welcomed, even if their fathers wielded their arms on the losing side, ten years ago.

"Of course, to a Prussian officer it would be practical ruin to be dismissed from the army. This is so thoroughly well understood that, in cases of duels, there is a sort of general conspiracy on the part of all the officers and surgeons of a regiment to hush the matter up. Still, if an officer is insulted–or thinks that he is insulted, which is about the same thing–he fights, and takes the consequences.

"I am not altogether sorry that I am an aide-de-camp, and I think that you can congratulate yourself on the same fact; for we are not thrown, as is a regimental officer, into the company of Prussians, and there is therefore far less risk of getting into a quarrel.

"I have no doubt the marshal, himself, will give you a few lessons shortly. He is considered to be one of the finest swordsmen in Europe, and in many respects he is as young as I am, and as fond of adventure. He gave me a few when I first came to him, but he said that it was time thrown away, for that I must put myself in the hands of some good maitre d'armes before he could teach me anything that would be useful. I have been working hard with one since, and know a good deal more about it than I did; but my teacher says that I am too hot and impetuous to make a good swordsman, and that though I should do well enough in a melee, I shall never be able to stand up against a cool man, in a duel. Of course the marshal had no idea of teaching me arms, but merely, as he said, of showing me a few passes that might be useful to me, on occasion. In reality he loves to keep up his sword play, and once or twice a week Van Bruff, who is the best master in Berlin, comes in for half an hour's practice with him, before breakfast."

After Lindsay had left him at the entrance to the palace, Fergus wandered about the town for some hours, and then went to the tailor's and had his uniform tried on. Merely run together though it was, the coat fitted admirably.

"You are an easy figure to fit, Herr Drummond," the tailor said. "There is no credit in putting together a coat for you. Your breeches are a little too tight–you have a much more powerful leg than is common–but that, however, is easily altered.

"Here are a dozen pairs of high boots. I noticed the size of your foot, and have no doubt that you will find some of these to fit you."

This was indeed the case, and among a similar collection of helmets, Fergus also had no difficulty in suiting himself.

"I think that you will find everything ready for you by half-past eight," the tailor said, "and I trust that no further alteration will be required. Six of my best journeymen will work all night at the clothes; and even should his majesty send for you by ten, I trust that you will be able to make a proper appearance before him, though at present I cannot guarantee that some trifling alteration will not be found necessary, when you try the uniforms on."

Fergus supped with the marshal, who had now time to ask him many more questions about his home life, and the state of things in Scotland.

"'Tis a sore pity," he said, "that we Scotchmen and Irishmen, who are to be found in such numbers in every European army, are not all arrayed under the flag of our country. Methinks that the time is not far distant when it will be so. I am, as you know, a Jacobite; but there is no shutting one's eyes to the fact that the cause is a lost one. The expedition of James the Third, and still more that of Charles Edward, have caused such widespread misery among the Stuarts' friends that I cannot conceive that any further attempt of the same kind will be made.

"In fact, there is no one to make it. The prince has lost almost all his friends, by his drunken habits and his quarrelsome and overbearing disposition. He has gone from court to court as a suppliant, but has everywhere alienated the sympathies of those most willing to befriend him. I may say that as a King of England and Scotland he is now impossible, and his own habits have done more to ruin his cause than even the defeat of Culloden. There are doubtless many, in both countries, who consider themselves Jacobites, but it is a matter of sentiment and not of passion.

"At any rate, there is no head to the cause now, and cannot possibly be unless the prince had a son; therefore, for at least five-and-twenty years, the cause is dead. Even if the prince leaves an heir, it would be absurd to entertain the idea that, after the Stuarts have been expelled from England a hundred years, any Scotchman or Englishman would be mad enough to risk life and property to restore them to the throne.

"Another generation and the Hanoverians will have become Englishmen, and the sentiment against them as foreigners will have died out. Then there will be no reason why Scotchmen and Irishmen should any longer go abroad, and all who wish it will be able to find employment in the army of their own country.

"This, indeed, might have happened long before this, had the Georges forgotten that they were Electors of Hanover as well as Kings of Great Britain; and had surrounded themselves with Englishmen instead of filling their courts with Germans, whose arrogance and greed made them hateful to Englishmen, and kept before their eyes the fact that their kings were foreigners. Hanover is a source of weakness instead of strength to Great Britain, and its loss would be an unmixed benefit to her; for as long as it remains under the British crown, so long must Britain play a part in European politics–a part, too, sometimes absolutely opposed to the interests of the country at large."

After supper was over, two general officers dropped in for a chat with the marshal. He introduced Fergus to them, and the latter then retired and joined the little party of Scottish officers at Lindsay's quarters. Lindsay introduced him to them, and he was very heartily received, and it was not until very late that they turned into bed.

At half-past eight next morning Fergus went to the tailor's, and found that he had kept his promise, to the letter. The uniforms fitted admirably, and were complete in every particular. As Marshal Keith had, the evening before, informed him that he had received his appointment to the 3rd Royal Dragoon Guards, he had no hesitation in putting on a uniform when, a quarter of an hour later, it arrived at his quarters. Donald went out and fetched a hairdresser, who combed, powdered, and tied up his hair in proper military fashion. When he left, Donald took him in hand, attired him in his uniform, showed him the exact angle at which his belt should be worn, and the military salute that should be given.

It was fortunate that he was in readiness, for at half-past ten Lindsay came in with a message from the marshal that he was, at once, to repair to the palace, with or without a uniform; as the king had sent to say that he should visit Keith at eleven, and that he could then present his cousin to him.

It could not be said that Fergus felt comfortable, as he started from his quarters. Accustomed to a loose dress and light shoes, he felt stiff and awkward in his tight garments, closely buttoned up, and his heavy jack boots; and he found himself constrained to walk with the same stiffness and precision that had amused him in the Prussian officers, on the previous day.

"So you have got your uniform," the marshal said, as Fergus entered and saluted, as Donald had instructed him. "It becomes you well, lad, and the king will be pleased at seeing you in it. He could not have blamed you had it not been ready, for the time has been short, indeed; but he will like to see you in it, and will consider that it shows alacrity and zeal."

Presently the door opened and, as the marshal rose and saluted, Fergus knew that it was the king. He had never had the king described to him, and had depicted to himself a stiff and somewhat austere figure; but the newcomer was somewhat below middle height, with a kindly face, and the air rather of a sober citizen than of a military martinet. The remarkable feature of his face were his eyes, which were very large and blue, with a quick piercing glance that seemed to read the mind of anyone to whom he addressed himself. So striking were they that the king, when he went about the town in disguise, was always obliged to keep his eyes somewhat downcast; as, however well made up, they would have betrayed him at once, had he looked fixedly at anyone who had once caught sight of his face.

"Good morning, marshal!" he said, in a friendly tone. "So this is my last recruit–a goodly young fellow, truly."

He walked round Fergus as if he were examining a lay figure, closely scrutinizing every article of his appointment, and then gave a nod of approbation.

"Always keep yourself like that, young sir. An officer is unfit to take charge of men, unless he can set an example of exactness in dress. If a man is precise in little things, he will be careful in other matters.

"Although he is going to be your aide-de-camp, Keith, he had better go to his regimental barracks, and drill for a few hours a day, if you can spare him."

"He shall certainly do so, sire. I spoke to his colonel yesterday evening, and told him that I would myself take the lad down to him, this morning, and present him to his comrades of the regiment. It would be well if he could have six months' drilling, for an aide-de-camp should be well acquainted with the meaning of the orders he carries; as he is, in that case, far less likely to make mistakes than he would otherwise be. Your majesty has nothing more to say to him?"

"Nothing. I hope he is not quarrelsome. But there, it is of no use my hoping that, Keith; for your Scotchman is a quarrelsome creature by nature, at least so it seems to me. Of the duels that, in

spite of my orders, take place–I know you all try to hide them from me, Keith–I hear of a good many between these hot-headed countrymen of yours and my Prussian officers."

"With deference to your majesty, I don't think that that proves much. It would be as fair to say that these duels show how aggressive are your Prussian officers towards my quiet and patient countrymen.

"Now you can retire, cornet."

Fergus gave the military salute, and retired to the anteroom.

"Have you passed muster?" Lindsay asked with a laugh.

"Yes; at least the king found nothing wrong. He was not at all what I thought he would be."

"No; I was astonished myself, the first time I saw him. He is a capital fellow, in spite of his severity in matters of military etiquette and discipline. He is very kind hearted, does not stand at all upon his dignity, bears no malice, and very soon remits punishment he has given in the heat of the moment. I think that he regards us Scots as being a people for whom allowances must be made, on the ground of our inborn savagery and ignorance of civilized customs. He does not mind plain speaking on our part and, if in the humour, will talk with us much more familiarly than he would do to a Prussian officer."

In a few minutes the bell in the next room sounded. Lindsay went in.

"Are the horses at the door?"

"Yes, marshal."

"Then we will mount at once. I told the colonel of the 3rd that I should be at the barracks by twelve o'clock, unless the king wanted me on his business."

Fergus had already put on his helmet, and he and Lindsay followed Keith downstairs. In the courtyard were the horses, which were held by orderlies.

"That is yours, Fergus," Keith said. "It has plenty of bone and blood, and should carry you well for any distance."

Fergus warmly thanked the marshal for the gift. It was a very fine horse, and capable of carrying double his weight. It was fully caparisoned with military bridle and saddle and horse cloth.

They mounted at once. The orderlies ran to their horses, which were held by a mounted trooper, and the four fell in behind the officers. Lindsay and Fergus rode half a length behind the marshal, but the latter had some difficulty in keeping his horse in that position.

The marshal smiled.

"It does not understand playing second fiddle, Fergus. You see, it has been accustomed to head the procession."

As they rode along through the street, all officers and soldiers stood as stiff as statues at the salute, the marshal returning it as punctiliously, though not as stiffly. In a quarter of an hour they arrived at the gate of a large barracks. The guard turned out as soon as the marshal was seen approaching, and a trumpet call was heard in the courtyard as they entered the gate.

Fergus was struck with the spectacle, the like of which he had never seen before. The whole regiment was drawn up in parade order. The colonel was some distance in the front, the officers ranged at intervals behind him. Suddenly the colonel raised his sword above his head, a flash of steel ran along the line, eight trumpeters sounded the first note of a military air, and the regiment stood at the salute, men and horses immovable, as if carved in stone. A minute later the music stopped, the colonel raised his sword again, there was another flash of steel, and the salute was over. Then the colonel rode forward to meet the marshal.

"Nothing could have been better, my dear colonel," the latter said. "As I told you yesterday, my inspection of your regiment is but a mere form, for I know well that nothing could be more perfect than its order; but I must report to the king that I have inspected all the regiments now in Berlin and Potsdam, and others that will form my command, should any untoward event disturb the peace of the country.

"But before I begin, permit me to present to you this young officer, who was yesterday appointed to your regiment. I have already spoken to you of him. This is Cornet Fergus Drummond, a cousin of my own, and whom I recommend strongly to you. As I informed you, he will for the present act as one of my aides-de-camp."

"You have lost no time in getting your uniform, Mr. Drummond," the colonel said. "I am sure that you will be most cordially received, by all my officers as by myself, as a relation of the marshal, whom we all respect and love."

"I will now proceed to the inspection," the marshal said, and he proceeded towards the end of the line.

The colonel rode beside him, but a little behind. The two aides-de-camp followed, and the four troopers brought up the rear. They proceeded along the front rank, the officers having before this taken up their position in the line. The marshal looked closely at each man as he passed, horse as well as man being inspected.

"I do not think, colonel, that the king himself could have discovered the slightest fault or blemish. The regiment is simply perfect. I hope that during the next few days you will have every shoe inspected by the farrier, and every one showing the least signs of wear taken off and replaced; and that you will also direct the captains of troops to see that the men's kits are in perfect order."

"That shall be done, sir, though I own that I cannot see against whom we are likely to march; for though the air is full of rumours, all our neighbours seem to think of nothing so little as war."

"It may be," Keith said with a smile, "that it is merely his majesty's intention to see in how short a time we can place an army, complete in every particular and ready for a campaign, in the field. His majesty is fond of trying military experiments."

"I hope, marshal, that you will do us the honour of drinking a goblet of champagne with us. Some of my officers have not yet been presented to you, and I shall be glad to take the opportunity of doing so."

"With pleasure, colonel. A good offer should never be refused."

By this time they had moved to the front of the regiment.

"Officers and men of the 3rd Royal Dragoon Guards," Keith said in a loud voice, "I shall have great pleasure in reporting to the king the result of my inspection, that the regiment is in a state of perfect efficiency, and that I have been unable to detect the smallest irregularity or blemish. I am quite sure that, if you should at any time be called upon to fight the enemies of your country, you will show that your conduct and courage will be fully equal to the excellence of your appearance. I feel that whatever men can do you will do.

"God save the king!"

He lifted his plumed hat. The trumpet sounded, the men gave the royal salute, and then a loud cheer burst from the ranks; for the rumours current had raised a feeling of excitement throughout the regiment, and though no man could see from what point danger threatened, all felt that great events were at hand.

The regiment was then dismissed, hoarse words of command were shouted, and each troop moved off to its stable; while the colonel and Keith rode to the officers' anteroom, the trumpets at the same time sounding the officers' call. In a few minutes all were gathered there. The colonel first presented some of his young officers to the marshal, and then introduced Fergus to his new comrades, among whom were two Scotch officers.

"Mr. Drummond will, for the present, serve with the marshal as one of his aides-de-camp; but I hope that he will soon join the regiment where, at any rate, he will at all times find a warm welcome."

Keith had already told the colonel that, for the present, Fergus would be released from all duty as an aide-de-camp, and would spend his time in acquiring the rudiments of drill.

Champagne was now served round. The officers drank the health of the marshal, and he in return drank to the regiment; then all formality was laid aside for a time, and the marshal laughed

and chatted with the officers, as if he had been one of themselves. Fergus was surrounded by a group, who were all pleased at finding that he could already talk the language fluently; and in spite of the jealousy of the Scottish officers, felt throughout the service, the impression that he made was a very favourable one; and the hostility of race was softened by the fact that he was a near relation of the marshal, who was universally popular. He won favour, too, by saying, when the colonel asked whether he would rather have a Scottish or a Prussian trooper assigned to him, as servant and orderly, that he would choose one of the latter.

After speaking to the adjutant the colonel gave an order and, two minutes later, a tall and powerful trooper entered the room and saluted. The adjutant went up to him.

"Karl Hoger," he said, "you are appointed orderly and servant to Mr. Fergus Drummond. He is quartered at the officers' house, facing the palace. You will take your horse round there, and await his arrival. He will show you where it is to be stabled. You are released from all regimental duty until further orders."

The man saluted and retired, without the slightest change of face to show whether the appointment was agreeable to him, or otherwise.

Half an hour later the marshal mounted and, with his party, rode back to the palace. After he had dismounted, Lindsay and Fergus rode across to their quarters. Karl Hoger was standing at the entrance, holding his horse. He saluted as the two officers came up.

"I will go in and see if dinner is ready," Lindsay said. "I told Donald that we should be back at half-past one, and it is nearly two now, and I am as hungry as a hunter."

Fergus led the way to the stable, and pointed out to the trooper the two stalls that the horses were to occupy; for each room in the officers' quarters had two stalls attached to it, the one for the occupant, the other for his orderly.

"I suppose you have not dined yet, Karl?"

"No, sir, but that does not matter."

"I don't want you to begin by fasting. Here are a couple of marks. When you have stabled the horses and finished here, you had better go out and get yourself dinner. I shall not be able to draw rations for you for today.

"After you have done, come to the main entrance where I met you and take the first corridor to the left. Mine is the fifth door on the right-hand side. If I am not in, knock at the next door to it on this side. You will see Lieutenant Lindsay's name on it.

"You need not be in any hurry over your meal, for I am just going to have dinner, and certainly shall not want you for an hour."

On reaching Lindsay's quarters Fergus found that dinner was waiting, and he and Lindsay lost no time in attacking a fine fish that Donald had bought in the market.

"That is a fine regiment of yours, Drummond," Lindsay said.

"Magnificent. Of course, I never saw anything like it before, but it was certainly splendid."

"Yes. They distinguished themselves in the campaigns of Silesia very much. Their colonel, Grim, is a capital officer–very strict, but a really good fellow, and very much liked by his officers. However, if I were you, I should be in no hurry to join. I had two years and a half in an infantry regiment, before Keith appointed me one of his aides-de-camp, and I can tell you it was hard work–drill from morning till night. We were stationed at a miserable country place, without any amusements or anything to do; and as at that time there did not seem the most remote chance of active service, it was a dog's life. Everyone was surly and ill tempered, and I had to fight two duels."

"What about?"

"About nothing, as far as I could see. A man said something about Scotch officers, in a tone I did not like. I was out of temper, and instead of turning it off with a laugh I took it up seriously, and threw a glass at his head. So of course we fought. We wounded each other twice, and then the others stopped it. The second affair was just as absurd, except that there I got the best of it, and sliced the

man's sword arm so deeply that he was on the sick list for two months–the result of an accident, as the surgeon put it down. So although I don't say but that there is a much better class of men in the 3rd than there was in my regiment, I should not be in any hurry to join.

"If there is a row, you will see ten times as much as an aide-de-camp as you would in your regiment, while during peacetime there is no comparison at all between our lives as aides-de-camp and that of regimental officers.

"I fancy you have rather a treasure in the man they have told off to you. He was the colonel's servant at one time, but he got drunk one day, and of course the colonel had to send him back to the ranks. One of the officers told me about him when he came in, and said that he was one of the best riders and swordsmen in the regiment. The adjutant told me that he has specially chosen him for you, because he had a particularly good mount, and that as your orderly it would be of great importance that he should be able to keep up with you. Of course, he got the horse when he was the colonel's orderly; and though he was sent back to the ranks six months ago, the colonel, who was really fond of the man, allowed him to keep it."

"I thought it seemed an uncommonly good animal, when he led it into the stable," Fergus said. "Plenty of bone, and splendid quarters. I hope he was not unwilling to come to me. It is a great fall from being a colonel's servant to become a cornet's."

"I don't suppose he will mind that; and at any rate, while he is here the berth will be such an easy one that I have no doubt he will be well content with it, and I daresay that he and Donald will get on well together.

"Donald is a Cuirassier. After Keith appointed me as one of his aides, he got me transferred to the Cuirassiers, who are stationed at Potsdam. That was how I came to get hold of Donald as a servant."

A few minutes after they had done dinner, there was a knock at the door. The orderly entered and saluted.

"You will find my man in there," Lindsay said. "At present, Mr. Drummond and I are living together. I daresay you and he will get on very comfortably."

For the next fortnight, Fergus spent the whole day in barracks. He was not put through the usual preliminary work, but the colonel, understanding what would be most useful to him, had him instructed in the words of command necessary for carrying out simple movements, his place as cornet with a troop when in line or column; and being quick, intelligent, and anxious to learn, Fergus soon began to feel himself at home.

Chapter 3: The Outbreak Of War

As Lindsay had predicted, the marshal had, on the evening of the day Fergus joined his regiment, said to him:

"I generally have half an hour's fencing the first thing of a morning, Fergus. It is good exercise, and keeps one's muscles lissome. Come round to my room at six. I should like to see what the instructors at home have done for you, and I may be able to put you up to a few tricks of the sword that may be of use to you, if you are ever called upon to break his majesty's edicts against duelling."

Fergus, of course, kept the appointment.

"Very good. Very good, indeed," the marshal said, after the first rally. "You have made the most of your opportunities. Your wrist is strong and supple, your eye quick. You are a match, now, for most men who have not worked hard in a school of arms. Like almost all our countrymen, you lack precision. Now, let us try again."

For a few minutes Fergus exerted himself to the utmost, but failed to get his point past the marshal's guard. He had never seen fencing like this. Keith's point seemed to be ever threatening him. The circles that were described were so small that the blade seemed scarcely to move; and yet every thrust was put aside by a slight movement of the wrist, and he felt that he was at his opponent's mercy the whole time. Presently there was a slight jerk and, on the instant, his weapon was twisted from his hand and sent flying across the room.

Keith smiled at his look of bewilderment.

"You see, you have much to learn, Fergus."

"I have indeed, sir. I thought that I knew something about fencing, but I see that I know nothing at all."

"That is going too far the other way, lad. You know, for example, a vast deal more than Lindsay did when he came to me, six months ago. I fancy you know more than he does now, or ever will know; for he still pins his faith on the utility of a slashing blow, as if the sabre had a chance against a rapier, in the hands of a skilful man. However, I will give you a lesson every morning, and I should advise you to go to Van Bruff every evening.

"I will give you a note to him. He is by far the best master we have. Indeed, he is the best in Europe. I will tell him that the time at your disposal is too short for you to attempt to become a thorough swordsman; but that you wish to devote yourself to learning a few thrusts and parries, such as will be useful in a duel, thoroughly and perfectly. I myself will teach you that trick I played on you just now, and two others like it; and I think it possible that in a short time you will be able to hold your own, even against men who may know a good deal more of the principles and general practice of the art than yourself."

Armed with a note from the marshal, Fergus went the next day to the famous professor. The latter read the letter through carefully, and then said:

"I should be very glad to oblige the marshal, for whom I have the highest respect, and whom I regard as the best swordsman in Europe. I often practise with him, and always come away having learned something. Moreover, the terms he offers, for me to give you an hour and a half's instruction every evening, are more than liberal. But every moment of my time in the evening is occupied, from five to ten. Could you come at that hour?"

"Certainly I could, professor."

"Then so be it. Come at ten, punctually. My school is closed at that hour, but you will find me ready for you."

Accordingly, during the next three weeks Fergus worked, from ten till half-past eleven, with Herr Van Bruff; and from six till half past with the marshal. His mountain training was useful indeed to him now; for the day's work in the barrack was in itself hard and fatiguing and, tough as his muscles

were, his wrist at first ached so at nights that he had to hold it, for some time, under a tap of cold water to allay the pain. At the end of a week, however, it hardened again; and he was sustained by the commendations of his two teachers, and the satisfaction he felt in the skill he was acquiring.

"Where is your new aide-de-camp, marshal?" the king asked, one evening.

It was the close of one of his receptions.

"As a rule, these young fellows are fond of showing off in their uniforms, at first."

"He is better employed, sire. He has the makings of a very fine swordsman and, having some reputation myself that way, I should be glad that my young cousin should be able to hold his own well, when we get to blows with the enemy. So I and Van Bruff have taken him in hand, and for the last three weeks he has made such progress that this morning, when we had open play, it put me on my mettle to hold my own. So, what with that and his regimental work, his hands are more than full; and indeed, he could not get through it, had he to attend here in the evening; and I know that as soon as he has finished his supper he turns in for a sound sleep, till he is woke in time to dress and get to the fencing school, at ten. Had there been a longer time to spare, I would not have suffered him to work so hard; but seeing that in a few days we may be on the march to the frontier, we have to make the most of the time."

"He has done well, Keith, and his zeal shows that he will make a good soldier. Yes, another three days, and our messenger should return from Vienna; and the next morning, unless the reply is satisfactory, the troops will be on the move. After that, who knows?"

During the last few days, the vague rumours that had been circulating had gained strength and consistency. Every day fresh regiments arrived and encamped near the city; and there were reports that a great concentration of troops was taking place, at Halle, under the command of Prince Ferdinand of Brunswick; and another, under the Duke of Bevern, at Frankfort-on-the-Oder.

Nevertheless, the public announcement that war was declared with Austria, and that the army would march for the frontier, in three days' time, came as a sudden shock. The proclamation stated that, it having been discovered that Austria had entered into a secret confederacy with other powers to attack Prussia; and the king having, after long and fruitless negotiations, tried to obtain satisfaction from that power; no resource remained but to declare war, at once, before the confederates could combine their forces for the destruction of the kingdom.

Something like dismay was, at first, excited by the proclamation. A war with Austria was, in itself, a serious undertaking; but if the latter had powerful allies, such as Russia, France, and Saxony–and it was well known that all three looked with jealousy on the growing power of the kingdom–the position seemed well-nigh desperate.

Among the troops, however, the news was received with enthusiasm. Confident in their strength and discipline, the question of the odds that might be assembled against them in no way troubled them. The conquest of Silesia had raised the prestige of the army, and the troops felt proud that they should have the opportunity of proving their valour in an even more serious struggle.

Never was there a more brilliant assembly than that at the palace, the evening before the troops marched. All the general officers and their staffs were assembled, together with the ladies of the court, and those of the nobility and army. The king was in high good humour, and moved about the rooms, chatting freely with all.

"So you have come to see us at last, young sir," he said to Fergus. "I should scold you, but I hear that you have been utilizing your time well.

"Remember that your sword is to be used against the enemies of the country, only," and nodding, he walked on.

The Princess Amelia was the centre of a group of ladies. She was a charming princess, but at times her face bore an expression of deep melancholy; and all knew that she had never ceased to mourn the fate of the man she would have chosen, Baron Trench, who had been thrown into prison by her angry father, for his insolence in aspiring to his daughter's hand.

"You must be glad that your hard work is over, Drummond," Lindsay said, as they stood together watching the scene.

"I am glad that the drill is over," Fergus replied, "but I should have liked my work with the professor to have gone on for another six months."

"Ah, well! You will have opportunities to take it up again, when we return, after thrashing the Austrians."

"How long will that be, Lindsay?"

The latter shrugged his shoulders.

"Six months or six years; who can tell?" he said. "If it be true that Russia and France, to say nothing of Saxony, are with her, it is more likely to be years than months, and we may both come out colonels by the time it is over."

"That is, if we come out at all," Fergus said, with a smile at the other's confidence.

"Oh! Of course, there is that contingency, but it is one never worth reckoning with. At any rate, it is pretty certain that, if we do fall, it will be with odds against us; but of course, as aides-de-camp our chance is a good deal better than that of regimental officers.

"At any rate, you have had good preparation for the campaign, for your work will be child's play in comparison to what you have been going through. How you stood it, I cannot make out. I worked pretty hard when I first arrived; but the drill for the first six months was tremendous, and I used to be glad to crawl into bed, as soon as I had had my supper.

"Well, you have been a poor companion so far, Drummond."

"I am afraid I have been, but will try and make up for it, in the future.

"I suppose there is no doubt that we shall march, in the first place, on Dresden."

"I think that there is no doubt of that. There is no Saxon army to speak of, certainly nothing that can offer any serious opposition. From there there are three or four passes by which we could pour into Bohemia. Saxony is a rich country, too, and will afford us a fine base for supplies, as we move on. I suppose the Austrians will collect an army to oppose us, in Bohemia. When we have thrashed them, I expect we shall go on straight to Vienna."

Fergus laughed.

"It all sounds easy enough, Lindsay. I only hope that it will come off just as you prophesy."

"That is one advantage of fighting in a foreign service, Fergus. One fights just as stoutly for victory as if one were fighting for home, but if one is beaten it does not affect one so much. It is sad to see the country overrun, and pillaged; but the houses are not the houses of our own people, the people massacred are not one's own relations and friends. One's military vanity may be hurt by defeat; otherwise, one can bear it philosophically."

"I never looked at it in that light before, Lindsay, but no doubt there is a great deal in what you say. If my father had fallen on a German battlefield, instead of at Culloden, our estates would not have been confiscated, our glens harried, and our clansmen hunted down and massacred. No, I see there is a great difference. I suppose I should fight just as hard, against the Austrians, as I should have done against the English at Culloden, had I been there; but defeat would have none of the same consequences. No, putting it as you do, I must own that there is a distinct advantage in foreign service, that I never appreciated before.

"But I see people are leaving, and I am not sorry. As we are going to be up before daybreak, the sooner one turns in the better."

Karl had received the order to call his master at three, to have breakfast ready at half past, and the horses at the door at four, with somewhat less than his usual stolidity.

"You will have harder work in the future, Karl," Fergus said.

"I shall be glad of it, sir. Never have I had such a lazy time as I have had for the last month. The first three or four days were very pleasant; then I began to think that I should like a little to do, so as to remind me that there was such a thing as work. But the last fortnight has been terrible. A man

cannot sleep for twenty-four hours, and if it had not been that Donald and I have had an occasional quarrel, as to our respective regiments and over the native land he is so fond of bragging about, I should have been ready to hang myself.

"Ah, sir, how often have I to thank my stars that I did not take my discharge!–which I could have asked for, as I have served my time. I had thought of it, many times; and had said to myself how delightful it would be to hear the morning call sound, at a barracks near, and to turn over in my bed and go to sleep again; to have no guard to keep, no sergeant to bully or provost guard to arrest one, if one has taken a cup too much. This fortnight has shown me the folly of such ideas. It has taught me when I am well off, and what misery it is to be one's own master, and to be always wondering how the day is to be got through."

"Well, you are not likely to have to complain that you have nothing to do, for some time now, Karl."

"No, cornet. I have felt a new man, since I heard the great news. There is always plenty to do, on a campaign. There are the horses to be cleaned, food to be cooked, forage and rations to be fetched. Then, too, on a campaign every one is merry and good tempered, and one sings as one marches and sits round the campfire. One may be cold and wet and hungry, but who cares? One swears at the moment, but one laughs again, as soon as the sun shines."

"Well, Karl, you had best turn in at once, for at three o'clock we shall want to be called."

"You can rely upon my waking, sir. Does my officer wish to take a full-dress suit with him?"

"No; the order is that all are to start in marching order, and that all baggage is to be cut down to the smallest proportions. No officer is to take more than can be carried in his valises."

It was the first week in August when the three columns, each twenty thousand strong, moved from their respective starting points. Although the king was nominally in command of the central division, Marshal Keith was the real commander. He rode with the king at the head of the column, and his aides-de-camp, and those of Frederick, were constantly on their way up and down the line, carrying orders and bringing in reports as to the manner in which the regiments maintained their respective positions, and especially how the artillery and baggage train kept up.

There was no necessity, at present, for taking precautions. The march would for some days lead through Prussia, and it was morally certain that the Saxon army–which was small and scattered and, even if united, would not equal the strength of one of the Prussian armies–would not attempt any serious resistance; for the country was flat, and there would be no defiles where a small force of men could successfully oppose a larger one. Nevertheless, the daily marches were long for the infantry and the baggage, but by no means fatiguing for mounted men. The staff and aides-de-camp, with their orderlies, rode behind the leaders. The troopers were sometimes employed, instead of the officers, when a short written order had to be sent back to the rear of the column.

The harvest having been gathered in, the cavalry rode across the open country, thus reducing the length of the column. The day was very hot, and the infantry opened their ranks, as much as possible, to allow the passage of what little air was moving. At nine o'clock the troops were halted. Each man had been served with a breakfast, before starting; and the haversacks were now opened, and a meal made of the bread they contained, washed down with an allowance of rough wine, carried in each regimental waggon. Then the men sat down, under the shade of greatcoats supported by ramrods and other contrivances, and either slept or talked until half-past two; when the bugle sounded. The greatcoats were rolled up and strapped on to the knapsacks, then there was a vigorous use of the brush, to remove the thick dust gathered on the march. At three the column got into motion again, and halted for the night at half-past six; when fires were lighted, coppers put on, and the main meal of the day presently served.

The rations of the officers were the same as those of the men, but the greater part of them supplemented the food by that carried in their orderlies' saddlebags. Lindsay, Fergus, and the marshals other two aides-de-camp had arranged that, when possible, they should mess together; and their

servants should prepare the meal by turns, while those not so engaged looked after the horses, saw that they were fed, watered, and groomed. The servants were all old campaigners, and though neither Lindsay nor Fergus had thought of giving them orders to that effect, both Donald and Karl had laid in a stock of provisions.

Donald had cooked a pair of fowls on the previous evening. Karl had bought a sucking pig. One of the German officer's servants had a huge piece of salt beef, that had already been boiled, while the other had a hare. It was agreed at once that the fowls should be left for early breakfast; and the beef put aside for dinner, and for supper, also, if nothing else could be obtained. Karl, as the servant of the junior officer, was cook for the evening, and he acquitted himself admirably.

Each officer carried in his saddlebag a tin plate, a drinking horn, and a knife, fork, and spoon. There was no dish, but the spit was handed round, and each cut off a portion. Soup made from the ration of meat was first served, then the hare, and then the sucking pig, while the four orderlies had an ample meal from the ration of meat. A supply of spirits had been carried in the staff waggon. This they took, plentifully watered, with the meal; with a stronger cup afterwards.

The night was so fine that all agreed that it was not worthwhile to erect the tent carried for them in the waggon. At eight o'clock the order for the next day's march came out, and two of the king's orderlies started on horseback with copies of it to the commanders of brigades, who in their turn communicated to the colonels of their respective regiments.

The next evening the force encamped round Torgau, a very strong fortress, where a great store of provisions had been collected. Ample quarters were assigned to the marshal and his staff in the town. Here they halted for a day to allow the other armies, which had both farther to march, to keep abreast of them on their respective lines of route.

Then, following the Elbe, the army arrived after two marches in front of Dresden. The court of Saxony had, for years, been wasting the revenues of the country in extravagance and luxury; while intriguing incessantly with Austria, and dreaming of obtaining an increase of territory at the expense of Prussia. No effort had been made to prepare to carry out the engagements entered into with Austria; and the army, utterly neglected, numbered but some fifteen thousand. These were scattered over the country, and but poorly provided with artillery.

When, then, the news arrived that three Prussian armies had crossed the frontier, there was no thought of resistance; but orders were despatched for the whole force to concentrate at Pirna, a strongly fortified camp among the defiles of the mountains separating Saxony from Bohemia. The position was almost an impregnable one, and they could receive reinforcements from Bohemia.

On the arrival of the Prussian army the king fled, and Dresden threw open its gates. As Frederick hoped to detach Saxony from the alliance against him, the greater portion of the army were encamped outside the town; three or four regiments, only, marching in and quartering themselves in the empty Saxon barracks. The aid Saxony could render Frederick would be insignificant, but it was most desirable for him that he should ensure its neutrality, in order to secure his communications with Prussia when he marched forward into Bohemia.

Finding the king had gone, his first step was to send a general officer, with a party of soldiers, to seize the archives in the palace. Among these was discovered the prize he most desired to find; namely a signed copy of the secret treaty, between Austria, Russia, France, and Saxony, for the invasion and partition of Prussia. Copies of this document were instantly sent off to the courts of Europe, thus affording an ample justification for what would otherwise have appeared a wholly unprovoked attack by Prussia upon her neighbours. Had it not been for the discovery of this document, Frederick would probably have always remained under the stigma of engaging in an unprovoked and ambitious war; for the court of Austria had hitherto, positively and categorically, declared to Frederick's ambassador and envoys the non-existence of any such treaty or agreement between the powers.

As the queen had remained in the palace, Frederick took up his abode in another royal building, Marshal Keith and a large number of officers being also quartered there. In order to prevent any

broils with the citizens, orders were issued that certain places of refreshment were to be used only by officers, while the soldiers were only to frequent wine and beer shops selected in the neighbourhood of the barracks, and were strictly forbidden to enter any others. Any soldier caught in an act of theft or pillage was to be hung, forthwith, and all were enjoined to observe a friendly demeanour to the people.

One evening, Fergus had been sent with a message to the camp, two miles from the town. It was nearly ten o'clock when he started to ride back. When within half a mile of the town he heard a pistol shot, in the direction of a large house, a quarter of a mile from the road.

Without hesitation he turned his horse's head in that direction. In a couple of minutes he arrived at a pair of large gates. They were closed, but he dismounted, fastened the bridle chain to them and, snatching the pistols from his holsters, ran along by the side of a high wall, until he came to a tree growing close to it.

With some difficulty, for his high boots were ill adapted to such work, he climbed the tree, got on to the wall, and dropped down. He was in large park-like grounds. Guided by a light in a window, he ran to the house. The door was closed. After hesitating for a moment he ran along and, soon coming, as he expected, to an open window, he at once climbed through it. A door was open and, passing on, he entered a large hall in which a light was burning.

Pausing to listen now, he heard voices upstairs and, holding a pistol in each hand and his drawn sword in his teeth, he lightly ascended the stairs. On the landing two men lay dead. Light was issuing from a half-closed door and, noiselessly approaching it, he looked in.

It was a small room. At the end stood eight or ten scared women, huddled together; while a soldier, with a pistol in one hand and a sword in the other, stood sentry over them. These were evidently the servants of the chateau, who had been unceremoniously hauled from their beds and gathered there, under a guard, to prevent them from screaming or giving any alarm. As Fergus was equally anxious that no alarm should be given, at present, he retired quietly.

A pair of double doors faced the top of the staircase. This was evidently the grand reception room and, listening intently, he could hear a murmur of voices inside. Turning the handle and throwing them suddenly open, he entered.

Upon the floor lay the body of a gentleman. A lady, pale as death and in a half-fainting condition, leant back in a settee; while a girl of thirteen or fourteen lay on a couch, with bound hands and a handkerchief fastened across her mouth.

Three soldiers were engaged in examining the contents of a large coffer of jewels. As the door opened they turned round and, on seeing a solitary officer, sprang forward with terrible oaths. Fergus shot one of them as they did so, dropped the pistol, and seized his sword. Both men fired. Fergus felt a stinging sensation in his left arm, and the pistol held in that hand dropped to the ground.

Confident in his swordsmanship, he awaited the onslaught of the two marauders. The swords clashed, and at the second pass one of them fell back, run through the body. The other, shouting for aid, stood on the defensive. Fergus heard the rush of heavy steps coming down the staircase and, just as three other men rushed into the room, he almost clove his opponent's head in two, with a tremendous blow from his claymore.

Two of the newcomers fired their pistols hastily–both missed–then rushed at him with their swords; and as he was hotly engaged with them the third, who was the sentry who had been placed over the women, advanced slowly, with his pistol pointed, with the intention of making sure of his aim. He paused close to the combatants, waiting for an opportunity to fire between the shifting figures of his comrades; when a white figure, after peering in at the door, ran swiftly forward and threw herself on his back, hurling him forward to the ground, his pistol exploding as he fell.

One of the others started back at the sound, and as he did so Fergus ran him through the body. He then attacked his remaining opponent, and after a few passes laid him dead beside his comrade. Picking up his own fallen pistol, Fergus blew out the brains of the soldier, who was struggling to free himself from the girl's weight, and then helped her to her feet.

"Well done, my brave girl!" he said. "You have saved my life. Now run and tell those wenches to stop screaming, and to come and help their mistress. These scoundrels are all killed, and there is nothing more for them to be alarmed at."

Then he ran to the girl on the sofa, cut her cords with a dagger, and freed her from the gag. As he did so, she leapt up and ran to her mother's side; while Fergus, kneeling by the gentleman who had fallen before he had entered, turned him over and, laying his ear over his heart, listened intently.

"He is alive," he said. "His heart beats, but faintly. Tell the maids to fetch some cordial."

The women were coming in now, some crying hysterically, some shrieking afresh at the sight of the bodies that were strewn about the room.

"Silence!" Fergus shouted sternly. "Now, while one runs to fetch some cordial, do three others come here, and aid me to lift your master gently on to this couch."

The maid who had overthrown the soldier at once came forward to his assistance.

"Now, Truchen and Lisa," the young girl said, stamping her foot, "come at once.

"Do you, Caroline, run and fetch the stand of cordials from the dining room."

The two women approached timidly.

"Now," Fergus said, "get your arm under his shoulders, on your side, and I will do the same. One of you others support his head when we lift, the other take his feet."

So, gently he was raised and laid on the couch. By the time this was done, the woman returned with a bottle of spirits.

"Now," he said, "water and a glass."

The young girl ran and fetched a carafe of water and a tumbler, standing on a table by the wall. Her hands shook as she handed it to Fergus.

"Are you sure that he is not dead, sir?" she asked, in a hushed voice.

"Quite sure. I fear that he is grievously wounded, but he certainly lives. Now, get another glass and put some spirits in and fill it up with water, and make your mother drink it, as soon as you have roused her from her faint."

Fergus now gave all his attention to the wounded man, poured two or three spoonfuls of strong spirits and water between his lips, and then proceeded to examine his wounds. He had three. One was a very severe cut upon the shoulder. His left arm had been broken by a pistol bullet, and he had a dangerous sword thrust in the body.

Under Fergus' direction the servant had cut off the doublet and, after pouring some more spirits down the wounded man's throat, he bade one of the other women fetch him some soft linen, and a sheet. When these arrived he made a pad of the linen, and bound it over the wounded man's shoulder with some strips torn from the sheet. Then he sent for some straight strips of wood, cut them to the right length, wrapped some linen round them and, straightening the arm, applied them to it and, with the assistance of the girl, bandaged it firmly. Then he placed a pad of linen over the wound in the body, and passed bandages round and round.

"Well done!" he said to his assistant. "You are a stout girl, and a brave one."

Then he turned to the others, who were crowded round their mistress.

"Stand back," he said, "and throw open the window and let the air come to her. That will do.

"The young lady and this girl will be enough, now. Do the rest of you run off and get some clothes on."

"She has opened her eyes once, sir."

"She will come round directly, young lady. Pour a spoonful or two from this glass between her lips. It is stronger than that you have in your hand. She has had a terrible shock, but as soon as she hears that your father is alive, it will do more for her than all our services."

"Will he live, sir?"

"That I cannot say for certain, but I have great hopes that he will do so. However, I will send a surgeon out, as soon as I get to the city."

The lady was longer in her swoon than Fergus had expected, and the servants had returned before she opened her eyes.

"Now," he said, "do four of you lend me your assistance. It would be well to carry this sofa with your master into the next room; and then we will take your mistress in there, too, so that she will be spared seeing these ruffians scattered about, when she comes to herself."

The doors leading to the adjoining apartment were opened, candles lighted there, and the wounded man carried in on his sofa.

"And now for your mistress. It will be easier to lift her out of the chair, and carry her in bodily."

This he did, with the assistance of two of the servants.

"Now," he said to the young girl, "do you stay by her, my brave maid. I think she will recover in a minute or two. Her eyelids moved as I brought her in. I will look round and see about things.

"Were these the only two men in the house?" he asked the other women, as he joined them on the landing.

"No, sir. There were six men. The other four have gone to bed, but the two outside always waited up till the count and countess retired."

"Where are their rooms?" he asked, taking a candle.

One of the women led him upstairs. As he expected, he found the four men lying dead. One had apparently leapt up as the door was opened, and the other three had been killed in their beds.

"Where can I get help from?"

"There are the men at the stables. It is at the back of the house, three or four hundred yards away."

"Well, take one of the other women with you, and go and rouse them. Tell them to dress and come here, at once."

He now went down to the gate, undid the fastening, and then led his horse up to the house. In a few minutes the stablemen arrived. He ordered them to carry the bodies of the six marauders out, and lay them in front of the house. When they had done so, they were to take those of the servants and place them in an outhouse. Then he went upstairs again.

"The countess has recovered, sir," one of the women said.

"Tell her that I will send one of the army surgeons down, at once. But first, bandage my arm. It is but a flesh wound, I know; but I am feeling faint, and am sure that it is keeping on bleeding.

"Here, my girl," he said to the one who had before assisted, "I can trust to you not to faint."

With her assistance he took off his coat, the arm of which was saturated with blood.

"You had better cut off the sleeve of the shirt," he said.

This was done, and the nature of the wound was seen. A ball had ploughed through the flesh three inches below the shoulder, inflicting a gaping but not serious wound.

"It is lucky that it was not the inside of the arm," he said to the girl, as she bandaged it up; "for had it been, I should have bled to death in a very few minutes.

"Has the count opened his eyes yet?"

"No, sir. He is lying just as he was."

"What is the gentleman's name?"

"Count Eulenfurst."

"You had better give me a draught of wine, before I start. I feel shaken, and it is possible that riding may set my wound bleeding again."

Having drunk a goblet of wine, Fergus went down and mounted his horse. As he did so, he said to one of the men:

"Take a lantern, and go down to the spot where the road hither turns off from the main road. A surgeon will be here in half an hour, or perhaps in twenty minutes. He will be on the lookout for you and your lantern."

Events had passed quickly, and the church bell chimed a quarter to eleven as he rode through the streets of Dresden. In three minutes he drew up at the entrance to the royal quarters. As he dismounted, Karl came out.

"Keep the horse here, Karl," he said. "It may be wanted in a minute or two again."

"Are you hurt, sir?" the man asked as he dismounted, for he saw his face by the light of the torches on each side of the gateway.

"It is only a flesh wound, and of no consequence; but I have lost a good deal of blood."

He made his way up the staircase to the marshal's quarters. He was feeling dizzy and faint, now.

"Is the marshal in his room?" he asked.

"He is in, sir, but–"

"I would speak to him immediately. 'Tis a most urgent matter."

The servant went in, a moment later held the door open, and said:

"Will you enter, sir?"

Fergus entered, and made the usual formal salute to the marshal. Two or three other officers were in the room, but he did not heed who they were, nor hear the exclamations of surprise that broke out at his appearance.

"I beg to report, sir, that the house of the Count Eulenfurst has been attacked by marauders, belonging to one of the Pomeranian regiments. The count is desperately wounded, and I pray that a surgeon may be sent instantly to his aid. The house stands back from the road, about half a mile from the north gate. A man with a lantern will be standing in the road to guide him to it. My horse is at the door below, in readiness to take him. I pray you to allow me to retire."

He swayed and would have fallen, had not the marshal and one of the others present caught him, and laid him down on a couch.

"He is wounded, marshal," the other officer said. "This sleeve is saturated with blood."

The marshal raised his voice, and called an attendant:

"Run to the quarters of staff surgeon Schmidt, and ask him to come here immediately, and to bring another of his staff with him, if there is one in."

In two minutes the king's chief surgeon entered, followed by another of his staff.

"First look to the wound of Cornet Drummond," the marshal said. "It is in the arm, and I trust that he has only fainted from loss of blood."

The surgeons examined the wound.

"It is in no way serious, marshal. As you say, he has fainted from loss of blood. He must have neglected it for some time. Had it been bandaged at once, it would only have had the consequence of disabling his arm for a fortnight or so."

The assistant had already hurried away to get lint and bandages. Another voice now spoke.

"Surgeon Schmidt, you will please at once mount Mr. Drummond's horse, which is standing at the door. Ride out through the north gate. When you have gone about half a mile you will see a man with a lantern. He will lead you to the house of Count Eulenfurst, who has been grievously wounded by some marauders. Surgeon Morfen will follow you, as soon as he has bandaged Mr. Drummond's wounds. There may be more wounded there who may need your care.

"Major Armfeldt, will you order a horse to be brought round at once for the surgeon, then hurry to the barracks. Order the colonel to turn out a troop of horse instantly, and let him scour the country between the north gate and the camp, and arrest every straggler he comes across."

Chapter 4: Promotion

As soon as the bandage was applied and the flow of blood ceased, a few spoonfuls of wine were poured down the patient's throat. It was not long before he opened his eyes and struggled into a sitting position.

"I beg pardon, sir," he said faintly, as his eyes fell on the marshal, who was standing just in front of him. "I am sorry that I came into your apartments in this state, but it seemed to me–"

"You did quite right, sir," said a sharp voice that he at once recognized, while the speaker put his hand upon his shoulder, to prevent him from trying to rise. "You were quite right to bring the news here at once of this outrage; which, by heavens, shall be punished as it deserves. Now drink a cup of wine, and then perhaps you will be able to tell us a little more about it. Now don't be in a hurry, but obey my orders."

Fergus drank off the wine; then, after waiting a minute or two, said:

"Count Eulenfurst is sorely wounded, sire, but I cannot say whether mortally or not. When I came away, he was still lying insensible. His wife and daughter are, happily, uninjured."

"Was anyone else hurt?"

"Yes, sire, the six menservants who were sleeping in the house were all killed–four in their beds, two while hastening from below to assist their master."

The king gave an exclamation of fury.

"You said these men belonged to a Pomeranian regiment. Had they left before you got there? But I suppose not, or else you would not have been wounded. How was it that you heard of the attack?"

"I had carried a despatch from the marshal to the camp, sire, and was on my way back when I heard a pistol shot. The sound was faint, for it came from a house a quarter of a mile away, and was fired indoors; but the night was still, and fortunately some of the windows were open. Thinking that some evil work was being done, I rode straight for it, climbed the wall and, making my way on foot to the house, happily arrived in time."

"You saw the fellows, then? How was it that they suffered you to escape with your life? They must have known that your evidence would hang them all."

"There were but six of them, sire; and they will need no hanging, for they are all disposed of. Though had it not been for the assistance of a brave servant maid, who threw herself upon the back of one of them, my career would certainly have been terminated."

"But who had you with you to help you?" the king asked.

"I had no one but the maid, sire."

"Do you mean to say, Mr. Drummond, that with your own hand you slew the whole of the six villains?"

"That was so, sire; but in respect to the one thrown down by the girl, I had but to blow out his brains before he could gain his feet."

"Can you give us the particulars?" the king asked quietly. "If you do not feel equal to it, we will wait till morning."

"I can tell you now, sire. I am feeling better and stronger."

And he related the incidents of the fight.

"One with his pistol, Keith," the king said. "Four with his sword, after his left hand was disabled, to say nothing of the sixth.

"That is not a bad beginning for this aide-de-camp, gentlemen."

"No, indeed, sire. It is a most gallant deed, though it was well for him that he was able to dispose of the first three before the others appeared on the scene."

"It was a most gallant action, indeed," the king repeated; and a hearty assent was given by the general officers standing round.

"I congratulate you on your aide-de-camp, Keith," he went on. "A man capable of killing, single handed, six of my Pomeranians is a treasure. Do you see that his commission as lieutenant is given me tomorrow to sign.

"No, sit still, young sir. It is I who have to thank you, for so promptly punishing these marauders, who would have brought disgrace upon my army; and not you who have to thank me. Now, be off to your bed."

Two of the attendants were called in, and these assisted Fergus, who was almost too weak to stand, to the apartment that he shared with Lindsay. Keith himself accompanied them. Lindsay leapt out of bed as they entered.

"Don't ask any questions, Lindsay," the marshal said. "Drummond has performed a very gallant action, and has been wounded and, as you see, can scarce stand from loss of blood. He will be asleep as soon as he lies down. You will hear all about it, in the morning."

The marshal then returned to his apartment. The king was on the point of leaving.

"I have left orders," he said, "that as soon as either of the surgeons returns, I am to be wakened and informed of the state of Count Eulenfurst. He is a nobleman of distinction and character; though, I believe, in no great favour at the court here since he resigned his seat on the council, because he disapproved of the resources of the state being wasted in extravagance, instead of being spent in maintaining the army in proper condition. Should he die, it will cause an extremely bad impression throughout Saxony."

At daybreak the next morning, finding that the surgeons had not returned, Keith despatched an officer to request them to furnish him, at once, with a written report of the state of the count. He returned in three-quarters of an hour, saying that the count had just recovered consciousness; that two of his wounds were serious, and the other very grave; but that having probed it, they were of opinion that it might not prove fatal. The countess was completely prostrated, and had gone from one fainting fit into another, and required more attention than her husband. The rest of the household were uninjured.

Lindsay got up quietly and dressed without awaking Fergus. He was disappointed at a despatch being at once handed to him to carry to the Prince of Brunswick's army, which was ten miles away; and was therefore obliged to mount and ride off, without obtaining any news whatever as to the nature of Drummond's adventure. As he passed through the camp of the Pomeranians, he saw the bodies of six soldiers swinging from the bough of a tree, close to the camp. He rode a little out of his way to discover the cause of this strange spectacle. In front of them was erected a large placard of canvas, with the words painted upon it:

"Marauders killed in the commission of crime, and their bodies hung by order of the king, as a lesson to anyone who ventures to break the law against plundering."

Then he rode on his way, and did not return until one o'clock. The marshal was occupied. He therefore simply handed in the reply to the despatch that he had carried, and immediately retired.

"Is Mr. Drummond up?" he asked one of the attendants.

"He is still in his room, sir. His servant is with him, and he is taking food."

He went straight to the room. Fergus was sitting up in a chair, eating a basin of strong chicken broth.

"This is a nice hour to be breakfasting, Lindsay," he said with a smile. "I feel quite ashamed of myself, I can tell you; but I am under orders. The doctor came here half an hour ago. I had just woke and got out of bed, and was going to dress, when he told me that I was not to do so. I might sit up to take breakfast, but was to keep perfectly quiet for the rest of the day. He said I only needed feeding up, that he would send me some strong broth, and three hours later I was to have some soup and a pint of Burgundy; and that if I obeyed his instructions, and ate and drank well, I should be able to leave my room tomorrow; though of course, I should not be fit for active service till my arm began to heal."

"But what is it all about, Drummond? I was sent off to Brunswick's camp, as soon as I got up, and have heard nothing about it; and the marshal forbade me to speak to you, when you were brought in last night. He merely said that you had done a very gallant action."

"There was nothing very gallant in it, Lindsay; but it turned out very fortunate."

Then he gave a very brief account of the previous evening's events.

"Well I should call that a gallant action, Drummond, if you don't. It is no joke for one man to tackle six, and those not ordinary marauders but Pomeranian soldiers. Of course, it was somewhat lucky that you had rid yourself of three of them, before the other three entered the room; and had it not been, as you say, for that girl, things might have turned out differently. Still, that does not affect the matter. It was a gallant business.

"What happened when you came in?"

"I don't know much about what happened. At first I made some sort of report to the marshal, and then I believe I fainted. When I came to, I found that they had bandaged up my shoulder, and poured some wine down my throat. I felt very shaky at first, but I know that I drank some wine, and was then able to give some sort of account of what had happened. The king was there, then, and asked me questions; but whether or not he was there, at first, I cannot say. I have a vague idea that he told the marshal, too, that he promoted me; but I am not quite sure about that, nor do I know how I got here."

"Well, if you are not mistaken about your step, I congratulate you most heartily. It is seldom, indeed, that anyone gains one in six weeks after his first appointment. I thought myself lucky, indeed, in getting it after serving only two years and a half; but I got it simply on nomination as one of the marshal's aides-de-camp. It is customary to get promotion, on such appointment, if there has been two or three years' previous service.

"Well, you have drawn the first blood in this campaign, Drummond; and have not been long in giving very striking proof that your month's hard work in the fencing school has not been thrown away."

The conversation was broken off by the entry of the marshal, himself.

"Pooh, pooh, Fergus!" he said, as the latter rose, "there is no occasion for saluting in a bedroom. I am glad to see you looking so much better. You could not have looked more ghastly, when you came in yesterday evening, if you had been your own wraith.

"There, lad," he said, handing him a parchment. "It is not usual to have a new commission on promotion, but the king told me that he had had it done, in the present case, in order that you might have a record of the exploit for which you have been promoted. You will see it is set down inside that, although but six weeks in service, you were promoted to the rank of lieutenant for a deed of extraordinary gallantry. You had attacked and killed, with your own hand, six marauding soldiers; who had entered the chateau of Count Eulenfurst, well-nigh murdered the count, killed six of his servants, and were occupied in plundering the house. In token of his thankfulness, that the life of so distinguished and enlightened a nobleman had been saved by you; as well as of approbation for the gallantry of your conduct, his majesty promoted you to the rank of lieutenant.

"You should keep that paper, Fergus, and pass it down to your descendants, as an heirloom. I congratulate you, my boy, with all my heart; and feel some satisfaction on my own account, for such an action as this shows those who are inclined to grumble, at what they may consider the favour shown to Scotchmen, that at any rate the favour is not misplaced. A general order to the army has been issued this morning saying that, some scoundrels, having disgraced their uniform and brought discredit upon the army, by a murderous and wicked attack upon the house of Count Eulenfurst, the king reiterates and confirms his previous order that any man caught when engaged in pillaging, or upon whose person any stolen goods are found, will be summarily hung by the provost marshal, or by any general officer before whom he may be brought.

"The king himself has ridden to the count's chateau, this morning, to make personal inquiries into his state, and to express his deep regret at the outrage that has taken place. It is a politic action, as well as a kind one. Of course, the event has occasioned great excitement in the city."

"And may I ask how the count is going on, sir?"

"The last report of the surgeons is a favourable one. He has partly recovered consciousness, and at any rate recognizes his daughter, who has divided her time between his bedside and her mother's. The latter has fallen into a deep sleep of exhaustion; but will, I doubt not, recover. The girl came down into the hall when the king called. She bore herself well, they tell me, and would have retained her composure, had it not been for the king himself. She came down the grand staircase, with four of her maids behind her–for a notice had been sent, half an hour before of his coming–prepared, no doubt, to meet a stiff and haughty king; but though Frederick can be every inch a king, when he chooses, there is, as you know, no kinder-hearted man alive.

"He went forward bare-headed to meet her and, as she stopped and curtsied low, he took her two hands and said:

"'My poor child, I am sorry, more sorry than I can tell you, for what has happened; and hope with all my heart that your father, whom all respect and honour, will not be taken from you. No doubt you look upon me as an enemy; but although compelled to come here, because your king is leagued with those who intend to destroy me and my country, I bear no ill will to the people; and have given the strictest orders that my soldiers shall, in all respects, treat them as firm friends. But unfortunately, there are scoundrels everywhere. These men have been punished as they deserved, and the whole army will join with me in deep regret at what has happened, and in the fervent hope that your father's life will be spared. I grieve, too, to hear that the countess, your mother, has suffered so greatly from the shock; and hope soon to be able to express to her, in person, the regret I feel for what has taken place.'

"The kindness of his tone, in saying all this, broke her down more than the words of the king. He saw that she was unable to speak.

"'There, there, child,' he said. 'I know what you are feeling, and that you are longing to go upstairs again, so I will say goodbye. Keep up a brave heart. The surgeons have every hope that your father will recover. And believe that you will always have a friend in Frederick of Prussia.'

"He kissed her on the cheek, and then turned and left the hall, followed by his staff."

Three days later the doctors were able to say confidently that, unless some change occurred for the worse, they believed the count would recover. On the fourth day, Fergus was sufficiently well to mount his horse. The countess and her daughter had repeatedly asked after him, and expressed their desire that he would come over, as soon as he was well enough to do so.

One of the aides-de-camp had gone over, twice a day, to inquire as to the progress the count was making. A guard had been placed at the gate, and an officer stationed there to receive the names of the stream of visitors from the city, and to inform them that the count was making satisfactory progress. By the doctor's orders, even the count's most intimate friends were refused admission, as absolute quiet was needed.

Fergus dismounted at the gate, and walked up to the house. The maid who opened the door recognized him at once.

"Will you come in, sir?" she said, with a beaming face. "I will tell the young countess you are here; and she will, I am sure, see you."

A minute later, the girl ran down the stairs. As she came forward she stopped, with sudden shyness. Absorbed in her anxiety for her father and mother, she had taken but little heed of the appearance of the officer who had saved them. That he was kind as well as brave she was sure for, although he had scarce spoken to her, the gentleness with which he had moved her father and her mother from the bloodstained room, and the promptness and decision with which he had given his orders, had inspired her with absolute confidence in him. She had a vague idea that he was young,

but his face, flecked here and there with blood, had left but a faint impression upon her memory; and when she saw the young officer, in his spotless and imposing uniform, she almost felt that there must be some mistake.

"Are you Lieutenant Drummond, sir?" she asked timidly.

"I am, countess."

"Was it really you who saved us, the other night?"

"I had that good fortune," he said with a smile.

She took the hand he held out, wonderingly, and then suddenly burst into tears.

"Oh, sir," she said, "is it possible that you, who look so young, can be the one who came to our assistance, and killed those six evil men? It seems impossible.

"I have been so unhappy, since. I did not know that you were wounded until the maids told me, afterwards. I had never even asked. I let you go, without one word of thanks for all that you have done for us. What must you have thought of me?"

"I thought that you were a very courageous girl," Fergus said earnestly; "and that, after what you had gone through, the sight of your father as you believed dying, and your mother in such a state, you were wonderfully calm and composed. It would have been strange, indeed, had you thought of anything else at such a time."

"You are very good to say so, sir; but when I heard, from the surgeons you sent, that you had fainted from loss of blood after delivering your message, I felt that I should never forgive myself. You had thought so much of us, and not of yourself. You had gone about seeing to our comfort, and giving orders and arranging everything, and all the time you yourself needed aid."

"The wound was a mere trifle," he said, "and I scarce gave it a thought, myself, until I began to feel faint from loss of blood. I can assure you that the thought that you were ungrateful has never once entered my head."

"And now, will you please come up to see my mother, sir. She will be most anxiously expecting you."

They went upstairs together and, turning to the right on the top of the stairs, entered a pretty apartment that was evidently the countess's boudoir.

"This is our preserver, mother," the girl said, as she entered.

The countess, who was advancing towards the door, stopped in surprise. She had been able, from her daughter, to gain no idea of the age of their rescuer; but the maids had all asserted that he was quite young. As he was, for so the surgeons had told her, one of Marshal Keith's aides-de-camp, she had pictured to herself a fierce soldier; and the sight of this youth, with his smooth pleasant face, surprised her, indeed.

"Yes, mother, it is himself," the girl said. "I was as surprised as you are."

"I have no words to thank you, sir, for the most inestimable service which you have rendered us," the countess said warmly, as she held out her hand. "Assuredly my husband would have died, had aid been delayed but a few minutes. As to my daughter and myself, they would probably have killed us, to prevent our ever recognizing or giving evidence against them. They only spared our lives, for a time, in order to learn where our jewels were kept. This was but a comparative trifle, though the jewels are precious, and there are none more valuable in Saxony. I have no doubt that after stripping the house of its valuables they would have buried them, intending some day to recover them; and would then have fired the house, in order to conceal all evidence of the crime that had been committed. It seemed to me wonderful, before, that one man should, single handed, have attacked and slain them; but now that I see you, it seems almost a miracle that you performed in our favour."

"It was no great feat, madam. I have the good fortune to be a fair swordsman; and soldiers, although they may know their military drill, have little chance with one who can use his weapon well. Then, too, I had fortunately but three to deal with at a time; and even then, I should not have come off victorious had it not been for the courage of the maid, who ran boldly in, sprang on the back of

one, and threw him to the ground, while he was waiting to get a steady aim at me with his pistol. I assuredly owe my life to her."

"The King of Prussia left twenty gold crowns for her, when he was here, saying that it was payment for saving the life of one of his officers; and you may be sure that we shall not be ungrateful to her. Your death would have involved that of my husband, and us. The king also ordered that inquiry should be made as to whether our men who were killed had families dependent upon them; and that if so, pensions were to be given to these, as their loss had been occasioned by the evil deeds of some of his soldiers. It was very thoughtful and kind, and my daughter seems quite to have fallen in love with him.

"I hope that in a few days my husband will be able to see you. He does not know that you are here. If he did, I am sure that he would wish to see you now; but the surgeons have insisted so strongly on absolute quiet, that I dare not let him hear of your coming."

"I am delighted to learn that he is going on so well, madame. I sincerely trust that he will not long remain an invalid."

"I suppose you would not have recognized me?" the countess asked.

"I should not, indeed. Of course, I could do nothing to aid you, and was chiefly occupied by the count. But indeed, you were then so pale that I might well be excused for not knowing you again."

The countess was a very handsome woman, of some seven or eight and thirty, with a noble figure and a gracious air; and bore no resemblance to the almost distraught woman, with her hair falling over her face, whom he had seen before.

"I am not a coward, Mr. Drummond," she said, "and when those villains first ran in and attacked my husband, I struggled desperately with the two who seized me; until I saw him drop, as I believed, dead. Then my strength suddenly left me, and I should have fallen to the ground, had the men not thrown me back into the chair. I have a vague recollection of seeing Thirza, who had retired for the night but a minute or two previously, carried in bound and gagged. They asked me several questions, but I could not reply; and I think they learned from the frightened servants where the family jewels were kept. The clashing of swords and the firing of pistols roused me a little, and after it was all over, and I heard you say that my husband was still living, my heart gave one bound, and I knew nothing more of what happened until next day."

After chatting for a short time longer Fergus took his leave, well pleased to have got through a visit he had somewhat dreaded.

The king remained for nearly a month at Dresden, engaged in carrying on negotiations with the Elector. By this delay he lost most of the advantages that his sudden movement had given him; but he was most anxious to detach Saxony and Poland from the confederacy against him, as he would then be able to turn his attention wholly to Austria, aided by the Saxons, while the Poles would aid his army in the east to keep the Russians in check. The Elector of Saxony–who was also King of Poland–however, was only negotiating in order to give time for Austria to gather an army in Bohemia; and so to relieve the Saxons, who were watched by the eastern column, which had crossed the defiles into Bohemia and taken post near Koeniggraetz; while that of Prince Maurice of Brunswick pushed forward farther, to threaten their line of retreat from the west.

The king at last became convinced that the King of Poland was but trifling with him, and in the last week of September started to take the command of the centre, which was facing the entrance to the defile, at Pirna. Marshal Keith had been sent, a week after Fergus was wounded, to assume the command of the western column, hitherto commanded by Prince Ferdinand of Brunswick.

Fergus remained behind for ten days, at the end of which time he felt perfectly fit for service again. He still carried his arm in a sling, but a generous diet and good wine had filled his veins again, and upon the day the king left he rode with Karl to rejoin the marshal.

He had been several times over to the chateau, and had on the last occasion seen the count; who, although still terribly weak, was now out of danger, and able to sit on a couch, propped up by

pillows. His thanks were as earnest as those of the countess had been and, having heard that Fergus was to start on the following morning to join the army on the frontier, he said to him:

"There is no saying how far your king may carry his arms, nor where you may find yourself. The countess will, therefore, write letters addressed to intimate friends at various large towns; telling them that you have placed us under a vast obligation, and praying them to do, for our sake, all in their power for you, under whatever circumstances you may arrive there. She will write them on small pieces of paper, each with its name and address on the back, so that they will make a small and compact packet, not much bigger than an ordinary letter.

"I trust that when you return to Dresden, lieutenant, I shall be able, myself, to do my best to prove my gratitude for your services."

After taking leave of the count, his wife, and daughter, Fergus rode back to the royal quarters. As Karl took his horse, he said:

"Herr lieutenant, I know not how we are going to manage."

"In what way, Karl?"

"Two magnificent horses, complete with saddlery, holsters, and pistols, arrived here half an hour since. The man who brought them said they were from Count Eulenfurst, and handed me this note:

"'Pray accept the horses we send you, as a feeble token of our gratitude. May they, by their speed and staunchness, carry you unharmed through dangers well nigh as great as those you faced for us.'"

Fergus walked by the side of the soldier as he led the horse round to the stable.

"There, sir," Karl said, pointing to a pair of splendid animals; "they are fit for a king."

"'Tis a noble gift, and indeed, I doubt whether the king himself has such horses in his stables. The question is, what is to be done with them? My present charger is an excellent one and, as a gift of the marshal, I could not part with it. As to the others, it is out of the question that I can take both. It would be altogether contrary to rules. I am entitled to forage for two horses–that is, when forage is to be had.

"Ah! I see what had best be done. Come to my room with me. I will give you a letter to the count."

He wrote as follows:

"Dear Count Eulenfurst,

"I cannot refuse the noble gift that you have made me, and thank you and the countess for it, with all my heart. At present, however, it places me in a difficulty. Aides-de-camp are allowed to take only two horses; indeed, my orderly could not take with him more than one led horse. The animal I have was the gift of Marshal Keith. That being so, you will see that I could not part with it. The only solution, therefore, that occurs to me is to beg you to add to your kindness, by taking care of the one that I send back to you by the bearer, until I return to Dresden; or find means to send for it, in the event of one of the others being killed.

"The only fault with your gifts is that they ought to be kept for state reviews, or grand occasions; for it seems wrong to take such noble creatures into the midst of a heavy fire. I am sure that I shall feel more nervous, lest a ball should injure my horse, than I shall do for my own safety."

When he had folded and sealed this, he handed it to Karl, who had followed shortly after him.

"I am sending back one of the horses, Karl, and asking the count to take care of it for me, until I return or send for it. Do you see any difference between them?"

"It would be hard to pick the best, lieutenant. They both struck me as being perfect in all points–both are four years old."

"Well then, you must take one at random, Karl. Had one been better than the other, I should have left it behind. As it is, take whichever you choose."

"The man who brought them told me, sir, that both were bred on the count's estates; and that he prided himself on having some of the best blood in Europe, both for beauty and stamina. He thought this pair were the pick of the stables."

"I almost wish I could leave them both behind, but I could not do so without hurting the feelings of the count and countess. But they are too good for an aide-de-camp's work."

"I don't think anything can be too good for that, sir. An aide-de-camp wants a horse that will stop at nothing; and sometimes he has to ride for his life, pursued by the enemy's cavalry. You will be the envy of the division, on one of those horses."

Karl returned an hour later with a message from the countess, saying that she could not disturb her husband, who was then resting, but that she understood Mr. Drummond's difficulty, and they should be very glad to take care of the horse for him, until he wanted it.

"You did not see the countess, I suppose, Karl?"

"Yes, sir, I saw her. She had me taken upstairs to her room. She asked if I was your servant, and when I said yes, she told me that she hoped I would take great care of you. I said that was my duty.

"'Nevertheless, do more than your duty,' she said. 'His life is a very precious one to us.

"'Is it not, Thirza?'

"The young lady nodded.

"'Here are five gold crowns for yourself,' she went on, handing me the money. 'They may help to make your bivouac more comfortable.

"'And now,' she said, 'there is something else, but I do not wish you to tell your master.'

"What am I to do, your honour?"

"You had better keep it to yourself, Karl," Fergus laughed. "I daresay I shall hear of it, someday."

"Very well, lieutenant, then that is all there is to report."

The next morning Fergus started early. Two days previously, a Prussian governor had been appointed to Dresden, and three thousand men were left under his command. Similar appointments were also made to all the fortified towns in Saxony; for now that the negotiations were broken off, and the King of Poland had declared finally for the Confederates, Saxony was to be treated as a conquered country. Nevertheless, strict injunctions were given that all cattle, wheat, and other provisions taken for the use of the garrisons, or for storing up in fortresses whence it might be forwarded to the army, were to be paid for; and that any act of pillage or ill treatment was to be most severely punished, as the king was still most anxious to gain the goodwill of the mass of the population.

Chapter 5: Lobositz

In Dresden itself, the feeling was far from hostile to the invaders. The discontent with the vicious government had been extreme, and the imposts now levied were less onerous than those which had been wasted in profusion and extravagance. The conduct of the troops had been admirable; and in the case of Count Eulenfurst, the personal visit of the king to express his regrets, and his generosity to the families of the servants, had produced a most excellent effect.

As Fergus rode into the camp, mounted on his new acquisition, it at once caught the marshal's eye.

"Why, Fergus," he exclaimed, "have you been robbing the King of Poland's stables? That is a noble animal, indeed."

"It was a present from Count Eulenfurst, marshal," Fergus replied. "He sent me two, but one of them he is going to keep for me until I return; for I could not part with Rollo, who is as good a horse as anyone can wish to ride; and I know his paces."

"You are right, lad, for it is always well to accustom yourself to a horse, before you want to use it in action; but in faith, it will be a pity to ride such a horse as that through the heat of a battle."

"I feel that, sir; but as the count, in his letter with the horses, said that he hoped they would carry me safely through dangers as grave as those I had encountered at his house, I feel that he would be hurt if, on my return, I admitted to him that I had saved it for show occasions."

"You are right," Keith said approvingly; "but that is the more reason that you should accustom yourself to it, before you use it for such work; as horse and rider should be as one on the field of battle and, unless the horse has absolute confidence in its rider, it is very difficult to keep it steady under fire."

"I suppose we shall not see the king for some time, marshal," Fergus said later, as Keith was chatting with him.

"On the contrary, he will be with us tomorrow. He rides today to have another look at the Saxon position, and to give his orders there. He will, tomorrow morning, join us. It is we who are likely to have the first fighting; for the Austrians must come to the relief of the Saxons, who are shut up, as in a trap, by our divisions. They made a great mistake in not retiring, at once, into Bohemia; which they could have done without difficulty, had they lost no time.

"There is no greater mistake than shutting a large force up, either in a fortress or an intrenched camp, unless that fortress is an absolute obstacle to an enemy. This is not the case with Pirna. The mountains can be crossed at many other points and, by leaving five or six thousand men in a strong position at the end of each defile, we could disregard them altogether, and march on southward. They have already been three weeks there, and we believe that they cannot hold out very much longer. However, it is probable that they may be able to do so until an Austrian force comes up, and tries to relieve them.

"From what we hear, two armies have already entered Bohemia, and we may expect that our first battle will not be far distant."

"Do we block the only line of retreat, sir?" Fergus asked.

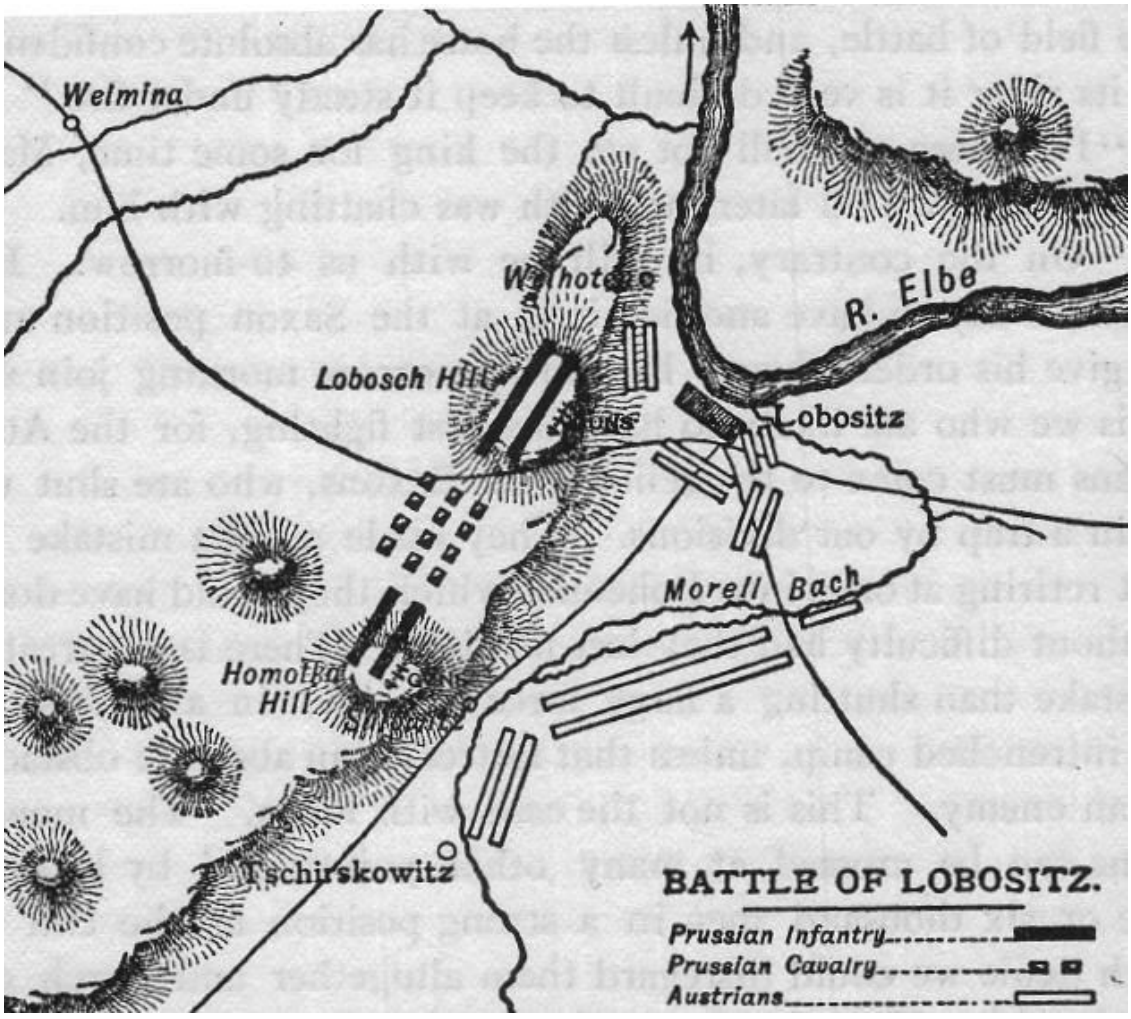
"No, indeed. We do not absolutely close the direct road, but our position, and that of Marshal Schwerin facing Koeniggraetz, so menaces their line of retreat that they dare not venture from their shelter; and our cavalry render it impossible for any supplies to be thrown in, unless the convoy is supported by an army. There are, we know, paths across the hills by which infantry might effect a passage; but as there is nowhere a place for them to retire to, we should easily overtake them and force them to surrender.

"No, their only hope is in the coming of relief."

A few hours later, the king himself rode in. In the evening, orders were issued that a force of cavalry and infantry were to march at daylight, and that the rest of the army were to follow, two hours later. It was soon known that the king had received news that Marshal Browne–an Irish officer of great distinction, who commanded the Austrian force gathered at Budin, on the Eger–was expecting the arrival of artillery and pontoons from Vienna, in the course of a day or two, and was preparing to cross the river. It was evident, then, that his intention was to relieve the Saxon army, in the first place.

The roads through the defiles were very heavy and difficult, but that afternoon the advance force reached Termitz. Late in the evening the rest of the army arrived there.

A squadron of cavalry had been sent off, as soon as the vanguard arrived, to ascertain the movements of the enemy; and they returned, at ten at night, with information that the Austrians had crossed the Eger that day, and were to encamp at Lobositz. The army at once moved on across the mountains and, after a very difficult and fatiguing march, arrived near Lobositz; and lay down for some hours in the order in which they had marched, taking up their position as soon as it was light.



The infantry were in two lines. Their left was posted on a steep hill known as the Lobosch, part of whose lower slopes extended to the village of Lobositz. A battery, with infantry supports, took post on a hill called Homolka, which commanded the whole plain between the two armies. The centre stretched across the valley between those hills.

On the low hill on which stood the little town, the Austrians had thrown up intrenchments, and posted a very strong artillery force, whose fire would sweep a greater portion of the Prussian position. Except at this point, the ground between the two armies was low and swampy. The Austrian force

was greatly superior in numbers, consisting of 72 squadrons of horse, 52 battalions of infantry, and 98 guns; while the Prussians had 55 squadrons, 26 battalions, and 102 guns.

It was evident to both commanders that the village of Lobositz was the decisive point; and indeed, the nature of the ground was such as to render operations almost impossible, in the marshy plain intersected by rivulets, which in many places formed large ponds.

At seven in the morning the Prussian action began by a heavy fire between the left, on the slopes of Lobosch, and 4000 Croats and several battalions of Hungarians, scattered among the vineyards and the stone walls dividing them. A heavy fog covered the whole country and, until a full view could be obtained of the position of the enemy, neither of the commanders deemed it prudent to move.

At twelve o'clock, however, the fog began to clear up. The main body of the Austrians was still invisible; and the king, seeing but a comparatively small force in the plain near Lobositz, thought that this must be the rear guard of the Austrians; who, he imagined, having found the line by which they intended to succour the Saxons occupied in force, had retired, having thrown up batteries and left a strong force at Lobositz, to prevent the Prussians from advancing.

To ascertain this, twenty squadrons of cavalry were ordered to advance; but on doing so, they were received by so tremendous a fire from the batteries of the village, and from others at Sulowitz, another village in the plain on their right, that they fell back with much loss, pursued by the Austrian cavalry. By the time they had resumed their positions behind the infantry, the fog had entirely lifted; and the king and Marshal Keith obtained a full view of the Austrian position, from the spot where they had stationed themselves on the hill. They agreed that no attack could be made against the enemy's centre or left, and that they could be assailed only on their right.

The troops on the Lobosch Hill were, therefore, largely reinforced; and the whole army advanced, inclining towards the left so as to attack Lobositz from the side of the plain, as well as from that of the mountain. A tremendous artillery fire, from the guns on the hills, heralded the advance.

The troops on the Lobosch Hill made their way forward rapidly. The ground was so steep that they commanded a view down into the vineyard, and their fire was so heavy that the Croats and Hungarians fell, as fast as they raised their heads above the stone walls to fire; and although General Browne reinforced them by some of the best Austrian infantry, they were rapidly driven down towards Lobositz. At the foot of the hill they were supported by several more battalions, brought from the Austrian centre. General Lacy, who commanded these, was wounded.

The Prussians halted at the foot of the slope and were reformed; having fallen into some disorder, from the irregular nature of the ground over which they had been fighting. The guns were brought forward, so as to cover their next advance; while a very strong force was sent to support the batteries on the Homolka Hill, so as to check the enemy's centre and left, should they attempt any movement across the plain.

In the meantime, Marshal Browne was reinforcing the defenders of Lobositz with the whole of his right wing. The village was defended with desperate bravery but, owing to the position, the king was able to reinforce the assailants very much more rapidly than the Austrian commander could bring up his distant troops. The Prussian artillery concentrated their fire upon the place, and set it in flames from end to end; when its defenders were forced to abandon it, and retreat with precipitation on their cavalry.

In order to cover their withdrawal, the Austrian left moved down to the village of Sulowitz, and endeavoured to pass the dam over a marshy rivulet in front of it; but the fire from the battery on the Homolka rendered it impossible for them to form, and also set that village on fire, and they were therefore called back. The Austrian centre moved to its right, and occupied the ground behind Lobositz as soon as the defenders of the village had fallen back, and then Marshal Browne formed up his whole force afresh.

His position was now as strong as it had been when the battle first began, for the Prussians could not advance except between the swampy ground and the river; and would have been exposed,

while doing so, to the fire of batteries both in front and in flank. The Austrians were still greatly superior in numbers, and all the advantages that had been gained might have been lost by a renewal of the action. The total loss in killed, wounded, and prisoners on the part of the Austrians was 3308. That of the Prussians was about the same.

Although indecisive–and indeed, claimed as a victory by both parties–the consequences showed that the advantage lay with the Prussians. Marshal Browne's object had been to relieve the Saxons, Frederick's to prevent this; and for the moment he had wholly succeeded.

On the other hand was the fact that Marshal Browne had drawn off his army practically intact, and that it was impossible for the king to winter in Bohemia, as he would have done had the Austrian army been defeated and dispersed; and the latter were still in a position to make a fresh attempt to rescue the Saxons.

To prevent this, the king despatched the Duke of Bevern with a large force, as if to get between the Austrians and the river Eger. This movement had the desired effect. Marshal Browne at once fell back, recrossed the river, and took up his position at his former camp at Budin. From there he opened communications with the Saxons, and it was arranged that these should pass the Elbe; and that he, with 8000 men, should also do so, and march to meet them.

The Saxons, however, were detained, owing to the terrible weather and the enormous difficulty of the defiles, and only crossed on the 13th. In the meantime the Prussians had taken up positions to cut off the Saxon retreat, and after crossing they found themselves hemmed in, and the roads so commanded by newly-erected batteries that, being utterly exhausted by fatigue and hardships, they had no resource but to surrender.

The terms enforced were hard. The officers were allowed to depart, on giving their parole not to serve again, but the whole of the rank and file were incorporated in the Prussian army.

Fergus Drummond and Lindsay stood by their horses, with the other members of the staff, some short distance behind the king and Marshal Keith, as they anxiously endeavoured to discover the whereabouts and intentions of the Austrian army; while the crack of musketry, between the Croats and the troops who were gradually pressing them down the hill, continued unabated.

"This is slow work, Drummond," Lindsay said, as hour after hour passed. "I should not like to have anything to do with the king, just at present. It is easy to see how fidgety he is, and no wonder. For aught we know there may be only three or four thousand men facing us and, while we are waiting here, the whole Austrian army may have crossed over again, and be marching up the river bank to form a junction with the Saxons; or they may have gone by the defiles we traversed the last two days, and may come down into Saxony and fall on the rear of our camp watching Pirna, while the Saxons are attacking in front. No wonder his majesty paces backwards and forwards like a wild beast in a cage."

From time to time an aide-de-camp was sent off, with some order involving the movement of a battalion farther to the right or left, and the addition of a few guns to the battery on Homolka Hill. Fergus had taken his turn in carrying the orders. He had, two days before, abandoned his sling; and scarcely felt any inconvenience from the wound, which indeed would have been of slight consequence, had it not been for the excessive loss of blood.

"These movements mean nothing," Lindsay said, as he returned from one of these rides. "The marshal makes the changes simply for the sake of doing something–partly, perhaps, to take the king's attention off this confounded delay; partly to interest the troops, who must be just as restless and impatient as we are."

The messages were taken, alternately, by the king's aides-de-camp and the marshal's.

At length, as the fog began to lift, the interest in the scene heightened. The king and Keith talked long and earnestly together, as they watched the village of Lobositz.

"They have got some strong batteries there," Lindsay said; "but as far as one can see, there does not appear to be any large body of troops. I suppose it is meant that the troops on the slopes shall retire there, and make a strong stand. I am bound to say that it looks very much as if Browne had

only left a strong guard here, to keep us from issuing from this defile; and that his whole army moved away last night, and may now be some thirty miles away, on their march towards Saxony."

As the fog lifted still more they could see the stream running right across the plain, and the little village of Sulowitz on its bank, apparently still and deserted. Presently Keith wrote an order on a tablet, and Lindsay was sent off with it, to the general commanding the cavalry.

"Something is going to be done at last, Drummond," he said, as he mounted. "It is an order to the cavalry."

An order was then despatched to the battery on Homolka Hill, and to the batteries on the left. Two more battalions of infantry then moved up, to press the Croats more quickly down the hill.

Fergus watched Lindsay, and saw him ride up to the general. Several officers at once galloped off. There was a movement among the cavalry, and then twenty squadrons passed out through the intervals between the brigades of infantry, and trotted out through the mouth of the valley. They went on without interruption, until abreast of Lobositz; and then a great number of men ran suddenly up, from the houses of the village, to the batteries.

A minute later some thirty guns poured their fire into the Prussian cavalry; while at the same moment the guns of a heavy battery, hitherto unseen, poured in their fire from Sulowitz on their left flank; while from rising ground, not visible behind it, came the roar of thirty more pieces.

So rapidly had the aides-de-camp been sent off, that Fergus was the only one remaining available. The king spoke a few words to the marshal, and then said to Fergus:

"Ride, sir, with my orders to the officer commanding the cavalry out there, and tell him to retire at once."

Fergus ran back to where Karl was holding his horse.

"Follow me, Karl," he said, as he sprang into the saddle; and then rode rapidly down the steep hill and, as soon as he reached the valley, dashed off at a headlong gallop.

"I have orders, Karl, to recall the cavalry, who will be destroyed unless they return. Should I fall, carry the order to their commander."

The din was now prodigious. The whole of the Prussian batteries had opened on Lobositz and Sulowitz, and between the thunder of the guns came the incessant crackling of musketry on the hill to his right.

Passing through the infantry, Fergus dashed across the plain. He was mounted on the horse the marshal had given him, as the other was not yet accustomed to stand fire. The noble animal, as if delighted to be on level ground again, and excited by the roar of battle, carried him along at the top of its speed without any need of urging. Fergus knew that on the heights behind the king and Keith would be anxiously watching him, for the peril of the cavalry was great; and the concussion of the guns was now causing the fog to lift rapidly and, as he rode, he could dimly make out dark masses of men all along the rising ground behind Sulowitz, and knew that the Austrian cavalry might, at any moment, sweep down on the Prussians.

He was drawing abreast of Lobositz, when suddenly a squadron of cavalry dashed out from the village. Their object was evidently to cut him off, and prevent any message that he might bear reaching the Prussian cavalry, which were now halted half a mile ahead. Their officers were endeavouring to reform them from the confusion into which they had fallen, from the speed at which they had ridden and the heavy losses they had sustained.

He saw, at once, that the Austrians would cross his line, and reined in his horse to allow Karl to come up to him. Had not the trooper been exceptionally well mounted, he would have been left far behind. As it was, while pressing his charger to the utmost, he was still some fifty yards in rear of Fergus.

As soon as he came up, the latter said:

"We must cut our way through the Austrians. Ride close to me. We will ease our horses a little, until we are within fifty yards, and then go at them at full speed. If I fall and you get through, carry the orders to retire to the general commanding the cavalry."

The Austrian cavalry had formed up in two troops, one twenty yards behind the other, and each in line two deep, extending across the road by which Fergus was riding. Seeing, by the speed at which he was travelling, that the Prussian staff officer had no intention of surrendering, the Austrian in command gave the order to charge, when they were some fifty yards away.

"Now, Karl, boot to boot. Go right at them!"

And with pistols in their left hands, and their swords in their right, they sent their horses at full speed against the enemy. These had scarcely got into motion when, like a thunderbolt, Fergus and his orderly burst down upon them.

The shock was irresistible. Their horses were much heavier and more powerful than those of the Austrians, and their weight and impetus carried all before them. Not a blow was struck. Horse

and rider went down before them, or were swept aside. They were scarcely conscious that they were through, before they encountered the second line.

Here the fight was much more severe. Fergus cut down two of his opponents and, with a pistol shot, rid Karl of an antagonist who was pressing him hard; and after a minute of wild confusion they were through the line, and riding at headlong speed towards the Prussians. Pistols cracked out behind them, but before the Austrians had time to turn and aim they were already fifty yards away, and going at a speed that soon left their pursuers behind. As soon as the latter saw this they drew off, and trotted back to Lobositz.

Fergus rode up to the officer commanding the cavalry.

"I bear the king's orders to you, general, to retire at once with your command."

It was time, for a body of Austrian cavalry, of much greater strength, could be seen galloping towards them from the high ground half a mile distant. In half a minute the Prussians were in motion but, as they returned, the storm of fire from the two villages burst out again with redoubled violence. Men and horses rolled over but, closing up quickly, the squadrons swept on.

The general remained stationary until his last squadron thundered by, and then galloped forward again and took his place at their head. Fergus had followed him, when there was a sudden crash, and he was thrown with tremendous force over his horse's head, and there lay stunned with the shock.

When he recovered he staggered to his feet, and saw that he was surrounded by Austrian cavalry; these having halted just where he fell, as pursuit of the Prussians was hopeless, and the balls from the Prussian batteries were falling thick.

"You are our prisoner, sir," an officer said to him.

"So I see," Fergus said bitterly. "It is hard luck, just at the beginning of the campaign."

"It is the fortune of war," the Austrian said with a smile; "and indeed, I don't think that you have any reason to grumble for, had that shot struck a few inches farther back, it would have carried off both your legs."

A sharp order was now given to retire. One of the troopers was ordered to give his horse to Fergus, and to mount behind a comrade; and they rode back to the Austrian main position, on the rising ground. Fergus was at once taken to the marshal in command of the Austrians.

"What is your name, sir?" the latter asked.

"Fergus Drummond. I have the honour to be an aide-de-camp on Marshal Keith's staff."

"A Scotchman, I suppose?" the marshal said, breaking into English.

"Yes, sir."

"What force is there opposed to us?"

"That I cannot say, sir. I only joined the army two days ago, and have been on the march ever since."

"Who is its commander?"

"Marshal Keith, sir; but the king himself is with it."

"I will see that you are made comfortable, presently, Mr. Drummond.

"Captain Wingratz, will you conduct this officer to the rear, and place a couple of soldiers to see that he is not annoyed or interfered with, in any way?"

Fergus was led away. Captain Wingratz called up two troopers and, choosing an elevated spot of ground, told them to dismount and allow no one to speak to the officer.

"From here," he said courteously to Drummond, "you will get a view of the field of battle."

Fergus sat down on the grass, and remained a spectator of the fight to the end of the day. He marked at once that the combat had rolled down the hill, and that the Prussians were making their way in force towards Lobositz. Then he saw heavy masses of infantry, from the Austrian right, move forward to aid in its defence. For two hours the battle raged round the village, the whole of the guns on both sides aiding in the fight. Then volumes of smoke and flame rose, and the Austrians were seen retiring. Sulowitz still kept up a heavy fire, and he saw a strong body from the Austrian left

move down there; while the centre advanced to cover the retreat of the defenders of Lobositz, and to check the advancing masses of the Prussians; and he thought, for a time, that a general engagement was about to take place. Then he saw the Prussian advance cease, the roar of cannon gradually died away, and the battle was at an end.

For an hour he remained, apparently unnoticed, then Captain Wingratz rode up with another officer.

"I am sorry to have neglected you so long, Lieutenant Drummond; but you see it was the fault of your own people, who have kept us so busy. This is Lieutenant Kerr, a compatriot of yours, who will take special charge of you."

"I am sorry that our meeting cannot take place under more favourable circumstances," Kerr said, holding out his hand. "It might well have been the other way.

"Now come with me to my tent. I have no doubt that you are hungry; I can assure you that I am."

The two walked together for about a quarter of a mile, the Austrian officer having left as soon as he had introduced them.

"There were three of us here this morning," Kerr said, as they entered the tent. "The other two are missing. One I know is killed; the other badly wounded, but whether he is dead or a prisoner I cannot say.

"By the way, are you not the officer who cut his way through the squadron of our regiment, and went on and joined your cavalry, who at once fell back? I was in Lobositz, myself. My squadron was not ordered out. As I hear that you were found by our cavalry as they followed the Prussians, it struck me that it might be you; although from Lobositz we could only see that it was a staff uniform that the officer wore."

"Yes, it was I. I was carrying an order for the cavalry to retire."

"That was what we supposed, as soon as you were seen coming down the valley; and as it would have suited us much better for the Prussian cavalry to have stayed where it was for a little longer, the general sent out a squadron to intercept you. It was a splendid thing to do, on your part. Of course, there were a number of us watching from the earthworks, and I can assure you that there was a general inclination to cheer as you cut your way through our fellows. I am sure that if I had known that it was a countryman I should have done it, though the action was at the expense of my own regiment.

"Our squadron suffered heavily as they rode back again, for that battery from the Homolka turned its attention to them, as soon as you had gone through. They had an officer and nearly thirty men killed and wounded before they got back into shelter.

"How long have you been out here?"

"Only about two months."

"Really! You are lucky in getting onto Keith's staff."

"He is a cousin of my mother's," Fergus said.

"And he made you lieutenant, and aide-de-camp, at once."

"No. I was first a cornet, but I was promoted at Dresden. The king had given strict orders about plundering, and it happened that I came upon some marauders at their work, and had the good fortune to rescue a gentleman of some importance from their hands; and the king, who was furious at his orders being disobeyed, himself promoted me.

"I had been lucky enough to get myself wounded in the affair. As I lost a good deal of blood, I looked no doubt a good deal worse than I was, and I expect that had a good deal to do with my getting the step."

"Well, you are a lucky fellow. I was eight years a cornet before I got promoted."

"I think my bad luck, in getting captured, balances my good fortune in being promoted so soon."

"To some extent perhaps it does, but you will get the benefit when you return. No doubt Fritz was watching you, as you rode. He must have seen our cavalry coming down the slope, before the

man in command of your squadrons could have done so; and must have felt that they were lost, unless his orders were received. He must have been relieved, indeed, when he saw you reach them."

This had indeed been the case. The king and marshal had both been watching through their glasses the Prussian cavalry, and marked how the ground behind them was dotted thickly with the bodies of horses and men.

"Will they never stop?" the king said impatiently. "These cavalry men are always getting into scrapes with their impetuosity. Gorlitz must have known that he was only sent forward to ascertain the position of the Austrians, and not to fight their whole army. He ought to have turned, as soon as that crossfire of their batteries opened upon them."

"He knew that your majesty and the whole army would be watching him, sire," Keith said quietly; "and I fancy that, under such circumstances, few cavalry men would draw rein till they had done something worthy of themselves."

At this moment the fog wreath moved away.

"See," the king exclaimed, "there is a great body of Austrian cavalry moving along behind Sulowitz. That rise behind the village must hide them from our men.

"Where is your messenger, Keith?"

"There he goes, sire. He is well out of the valley now and, by the pace he is riding at, he won't be long before he reaches them."

"He won't reach them at all," the king said curtly, a minute later. "See, there is a squadron of horse riding out from Lobositz, to cut him off. No doubt they guess what his errand is."

"I see them, sire, and he must see them, too. He is checking his horse, for his orderly is coming up to him."

"Then the cavalry will be lost," the king said. "The enemy's batteries are playing havoc with them, and they will have the Austrians down upon them in a few minutes.

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.