

Don't you stir, sir! I'll be back in a minute,' and with this the brave old woman left the room, locking the door after her.

She was not alone when she came back about half an hour afterwards; the country parson, the schoolmaster, the country judge, and half a dozen more of the dignitaries of the village, were with her. The little room was quite full when all these distinguished visitors had entered it. Charles sat in the old arm-chair, quite motionless, his face covered with both his hands.

The honest villagers had made up their minds at once what to do with the deserter; they looked upon the crime as an ignominy, by which he had not only disgraced himself, but also their community at large, and they were not the men to put up with such an affront. The schoolmaster, who was a politician, and subscribed to a newspaper, having informed them that the headquarters of the commander-in-chief of the army were but about two days' march from the village, they had resolved at once to escort him thither. The judge proclaimed the young man a prisoner in the name of his majesty the king, and called upon him to follow him to a place of security for the night, as on the following morning they would in a body convey him to his excellency the field-marshal, General Blucher. He rose and followed them without opposition. When they were all gone, the old woman took up the Holy Scriptures once more; but it was in vain that she strove to read; her eye grew dim, and the letters were all swimming confusedly before them, so she put it down again, and wept bitterly.

Early on the following morning, a strange procession was seen emerging from the little village of Burnheim—four old peasants escorting one young soldier. The country judge, with grave air, marched ahead of them, whilst the schoolmaster, who had obstinately insisted upon accompanying the expedition, brought up the rear. The prisoner, with downcast eyes and fallen countenance, was walking between the other two patriots; and as he had pledged his word not to make any attempt at flight, they had consented to leave his hands untied. When the expedition, after a day's march, put up for the night in a small hamlet, they were told that all the villages around were crammed full with Frenchmen, so they were obliged to take a long roundabout way; and it was not before the morning of the fifth day after their departure, that they reached headquarters.

'Where is the residence of the commander-in-chief?' asked they of one of the ordnance officers, who were galloping through the streets in every direction.

'Why, in the chateau, to be sure, where the two hussars were mounting guard on horseback.'

When they had entered the yard, they were not in the least discouraged at the sight of whole scores of adjutants and orderly-officers of every rank and arm, all of whom seemed to have some urgent business with the commander-in-chief; for no sooner had any of them been despatched than he was seen mounting again, and tearing away with his horse's belly to the ground. It never entered their heads for one moment that the general might consider their own business to be of a somewhat smaller importance, although the schoolmaster argued from what he saw that something of consequence was going on just now. The worthy man was right so far; the commander-in-chief was about to give battle on the following day. When they had been waiting patiently for a couple of hours, and began to feel somewhat tired and hungry, the country judge, con-

scious of the importance of his mission, ventured at last to accost one of the officers of the general's staff, who was passing by with a package of sealed letters in his hand; but the hasty functionary did not even stop to give ear to the address of the head man of the rural deputation, but merely grumbled something about the propriety of their going to Jericho—or further.

Our worthy inhabitants of Burnheim, however, were not the men to give way so soon, and renewed the charge accordingly. This time it was a middle-aged man with a benevolent countenance, whom they made acquainted with their request to see the field-marshal on most urgent business.

'Why, they had chosen their time rather badly; indeed; the general was extremely busy. Couldn't one of the secretaries do as well?'

'By no means; they must see the general himself.'

'Was it an information concerning the enemy which they wanted to deliver?'

'O no; something much more important—from Burnheim,' added the schoolmaster.

The middle-aged officer with the benevolent countenance laughed, and said he would try. After the lapse of about half an hour, he came back and beckoned them to follow. They were ushered into an ante-room, and directed to wait for his excellency.

The door opened after another half hour's waiting, and an old man with gray hairs, iron-cut features, and bright eyes, entered the room; it was the commander-in-chief, "Old Father Blucher," as the soldiers called him. The country judge stepped forward, and bowing very low, delivered the speech he had been pondering ever since he had left his native place, and which, of course, he thought to be very eloquent. He stated all that has been told already in the course of this narrative: how the deserter's own mother had given information of her son's crime; how they had resolved at once to bring him back to headquarters; and concluded his address with a hope that his excellency would not be induced to think worse of their village because of one that had rendered himself unworthy of the name of a Prussian. The tears came trickling down his honest cheeks.

The general looked very grave indeed. Those large bright eyes of his gazed for an instant over his rural audience with a strange expression. He knew at a glance what sort of men they were he had to deal with; then his looks rested for a while on the bent figure of the young man, with his downcast eyes and care-worn face, appeared the very image of misery and dejection. He knew his case to be a hopeless one; deserting colors in time of war is a capital crime, and Father Blucher, with his iron-will, was the last man in the world to be trifled with.

On a sudden, the features of the old hero assumed an expression of harshness. Turning round towards the speaker of this singular deputation, he said in a rough voice and in a very abrupt manner: 'Mr. Judge, you are an ass.'

The villagers started as if they had been stung. After all the anxiety and trouble they had undergone for the cause they had considered to be a just one, they had expected a somewhat more cordial reception.

'But your excellency'—remonstrated the amazed dignitary.

'Hold your tongue, I say; you are an ass. I know better. In Burnheim there are no runaways. And you, my son,' he went on, with his iron features relenting a little, and with that same strange expression in his large bright eyes, 'you will show them to-

morrow on the battle-field what a Burnheim man can do, will you not?'

The young man dropped down on his knees, and was stammering a few broken words, which the general did not hear, however, for when the lad arose again with high flushed cheeks and sparkling eyes—a far different man—Blucher had already left the room.

The worthy peasants, whose perceptive faculties were by no means equal to their honesty, began at last to get a glimpse of the general's real meaning. The country judge was the first to throw his cap high in the air, and to give three hearty cheers for Father Blucher, who, with one single word, had extinguished what they considered a stain from their beloved village, comforted the broken heart of a mother, and preserved a pair of arms for the defence of the country—arms that could not fail to do their duty now.

When they had given vent to their enthusiasm after their hearts' content, and taken leave of the young man, who was carried away by an ad-do-camp of the general's staff, they made up their minds to buy some provisions in the place, and return again to the village. They had, however, scarcely reached the yard, when they were overtaken by the same middle-aged officer who had announced them to the commander-in-chief, and asked them what in heaven's name they were going to do now.

'Why, going back again, to be sure. To Burnheim, you know,' ejaculated the schoolmaster.

And did they think that his excellency would allow anybody to leave headquarters without having had a dinner first? He had already given orders to that effect, and they had but to follow this non-commissioned officer here, and he would show them the way.

They needed not to be told twice, we may be sure; and when they were shown into a kitchen-room, where dinner was served up for them, with a bottle of wine standing before each cover, they felt very grateful to his excellency, and very proud at the same time because of the honor shown to the representatives of their village. But when each of them found a double Frederick's d'or under his plate, their enthusiasm burst out afresh, and many were the healths drunk to the welfare of Old Father Blucher.

When they had all eaten and drunk their fill, and were about to take their leave, they fell in once more with their friend the middle-aged officer, who gave them some advice concerning the best way of reaching their village without running any danger, for, as he said, the coming day would be an eventful one. He accompanied them through the yard to the gateway, where he bade them farewell, pointing, as he left, to one of the hussars who was mounting guard on horseback before the gate.

By heaven, it was their prisoner, the boy Charles, now fully pardoned by his excellency the commander-in-chief. How proud he looked, with flushed cheeks and sparkling eyes! He dared not address them, for he was on duty; but he looked at them as much as to say, 'Wait, and you shall see to-morrow.'

Nor was he faithless to the vow. On the evening of the following day, the memorable 26th of August, when the bloody victory of the Katzbach was gained, and the field-marshal rode through the thinned ranks of his men, who greeted him with enthusiastic cheers, he was addressed by the commanding officer of the 21st Hussars, who reported how greatly the private Charles Fisher had distinguished himself above all the rest, having taken