

THE TALL MAN.

CHAPTER XIII.—THE INTERMISSION.

Lane, the life-guardman, was tried by court-martial, and condemned to run the gauntlet ten times.

All that he could urge in his defense was of no avail; military discipline was to be kept up.

The private secretary Kruger, Lane's only friend in Berlin, took great and painful interest in his case, and wrote a most moving petition, in which he stated the peculiar hardship of his fate, and the sudden overwhelming impulse under which he had acted, which was not planned and premeditated.

This petition never reached the king. Lane listened to his sentence with apathy, though at the same time he seemed to realize the image of his comrade Arnold, who had passed under the punishment through the ranks of his former fellow-soldiers to the sound of the drums and trumpets that drowned his cries of agony; but he did not experience any horror or dread; he knew he should die under the punishment, and he had no longer any wish to live.

On the day before the one fixed for the execution of the sentence, Evermann, the king's gentleman in waiting, proceeded to the castle to perform his customary service. He seemed somewhat discomposed as he left his own house.

"Stupid trash!" he muttered to himself; "I shall take good care not to put my finger between the tree and the bark! I shall not meddle with the king's life-guardman; my wife is a fool. Deuter is a fool too, and seems always frightened out of his wits. If this man taught the boy, I suppose he was paid for it; and if he jumped into the mill-stream to save him, there was no danger to such a giant as he is. Bah! they have tried to work on me with a pack of lies, and make me promise to speak to the king, but I shall do nothing of the kind. I will be as great a fool as they, and displease the king for nothing."

He performed his usual duties, and true to his determination, did not go to the king in favor of poor Lane. But while the king was still at the dinner-table and he was in attendance, a servant said to him privately—

"Sir, your wife and your little son are in the auto-room waiting to speak to His Majesty when he rises from table. Are you aware of it?"

Evermann started, and was visibly annoyed. He hastened into the ante-room the moment he had the opportunity.

"What do you want here?" he asked roughly.

"I wish to see poor Lane, your Majesty, and to see your little son."

"Are you mad, woman?" asked the enraged Evermann, "must I have you removed by the guard?"

"I am not mad," she replied, with a firmness which her husband had never shown in her before. "I am anxious to see your Majesty, and to see your little son."

"You are only preparing trouble for me and for yourself," replied Evermann, more gently; the king is not in good humor, and it is therefore dangerous to ask him anything."

"Deuter and I will try to put him in a good humor," she answered. "Your Majesty, I shall say to him, 'you are unhappy, because you are going to make an innocent man run the gauntlet. If your Majesty will pardon him, you will be happy again directly; your Majesty, you are a good father, and your Majesty, as such you pray every day, forgive us, your trespasses, as we forgive them that trespass against us; and Lane has not even trespassed against you; for he has only done what his duty as a husband and a father required of him. Your Majesty, I shall add, 'my husband prides himself as being your right hand.'"

"Silence, foolish woman!" interrupted Evermann, while he looked around in dismay at several persons who were listening. But she went on without heeding him.

"Your Majesty, I shall say, 'if my husband is your right hand, you will surely pardon the man who saved the life of his only child, and you will look upon this favor as the richest reward which you can grant my husband for the services that he has rendered you.' That is the thing which I wish to say to the king, and I shall add anything else that comes into my mind that I think may soften him."

Evermann looked very uneasily at his wife and son, who both stood before him with a composed and determined air; a thing which seemed to him all the more astonishing, as he had had his first and best placed among the Fustlers."

"The giant amongst them would look like an ostrich among partridges," answered Evermann; "but I must inform your Majesty that this deserter Lane is pined by all Berlin, on account of his sad fate. The man deserted in a state of madness because his wife, being his wife to be dead, had married another man."

"That is not my fault," said the king; "order and discipline must be maintained, otherwise there would be no end of desertions."

"I do not myself recommend any general clemency," said Evermann; "but if your Majesty, as an exception to the general rule, would be pleased to use your prerogative to grant a pardon, I would respectfully entreat your Majesty, to do it on this occasion. Your Majesty will remember that I have very seldom asked any thing, and I am now induced to do so this time by very unusual circumstances. The deserter Lane saved the life of my only child, and has thus gained the boy's affection to such a degree that he is ready to die for his preserver. Ever since yesterday morning the boy and his mother have been in the castle in order to implore your Majesty to pardon Lane. My boy Deuter had expressed a wish to enter business, and with his father's consent Librecht took him back when he returned to Frankfurt, where he was richly repaid for all he had done for his friend. Lane's death, therefore, would have been a service was framed and glazed, and hung up in the family sitting-room. Underneath were the words, 'A TERRIBLE YEAR IN MY LIFE.'"

"The man does not seem to me to be thoroughly bad," said Evermann. "Ah!" replied the king, "who would be mad enough to raise his hand against me? He would certainly be out in pieces."

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tially to him; I have more courage than, and he is less haughty than in the daytime."

"Well," replied the lady, "show me then some place in the castle where we may await the termination of the affair. And if you do not succeed in touching the king's heart, we will make the attempt ourselves."

Evermann then desired one of the servants to conduct his wife and son to an apartment in the castle, secretly hoping that they would get tired of waiting and return home.

But he was mistaken, for neither mother nor son would stir from the place. Never had Evermann looked forward to night with so much trepidation, anxiety and uneasiness.

The day passed on as usual, and Evermann, who knew the king well, could not but see that the royal weather-glass pointed to bad weather, and there was but little prospect of a pardon for Lane. He assisted the perversely silent monarch to undress without being able to find any opportunity of turning the conversation to the subject of the deserter. Cold drops bedewed his forehead as he thought of his wife and son who were waiting below; he knew they would keep their word.

Several times his lips parted to speak, but the fear of man closed them again. He was almost in despair, when suddenly putting his hand into his pocket of the dressing-gown which he was handing to the king, he found an object which gave an opening for the conversation he wished.

"Has your Majesty been in want of this paper?" he said, as he held it to the king.

"What paper is it?" asked the monarch.

"It is covered with writing in pencil," replied Evermann, glancing at it. "Ah, I remember," said the king; "some time ago I caught one of my gentlemen writing in the ante-room; I meant to read the scroll, but I forgot it again. I suppose it is only a repetition of the lament which the man gave me by word of mouth."

"Will your Majesty permit me to read it aloud to you?" asked Evermann.

The monarch nodded, and Evermann read the letter aloud. It contained an account of Lane's sad fate, and of his longing for his family and for speedy news of them through Bertram.

The writer had then continued: "I do not know whether to call it blindness, a sense of too great security, or a good conscience, which carries Frederick William I. to confide the protection of his person so entirely to a troop of hired soldiers, who, having partly by force and deception, and not really feel any devotion to their master. If I brought up by my presence in the ante-room, an full of bitterness and rage, and even of a feeling of revenge against the author of my misery, how much more must this be the case with you, my dear comrades, who have grown up without religion!"

I write these lines in the king's ante-chamber. Tomorrow in the door of his sleeping apartment; he sleeps peacefully, while I, who have been rendered wretched by him, am a few steps off, armed with a deadly weapon. How much more safely might he repose if, instead of a gigantic body-guard, he was protected by the love of contented subjects. May God keep me from temptation! My He grant that I may not be reduced to utter despair, and that the king may not come near me alone and in the silent night! I could not answer for myself that * * *

Here the letter was broken off.

"That is a despicable fellow," said the monarch; "and I stood opposite to him, unarmed and alone, in the dead of night."

"And the man does not seem to me to be thoroughly bad," said Evermann.

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perous citizen, who with his family, will ever pray for your welfare!"

"It will not do," said the monarch; "think of the bad example."

"It is in your Majesty's power," said Evermann; "again I implore mercy; may I not send my wife and child away with comforting intelligence?"

"How can I go to sleep if you fever me by worrying me?" said the king; "I will see what can be done for the man; I tell your wife so, and now leave her to torment me."

Evermann kissed his master's hand gratefully, and went to carry to his wife and son the royal promise, from which he hoped everything while they hoped nothing.

The next morning Lane said to Wilhelm, the son of the barrack-servant—"Do you now that Lane is not in the gauntlet; it has all been altered; say he has made an attempt on the king's life, and he is to be confined in the fortress for life."

Lane was really taken away in a carriage closely shut up and accompanied by horsemen, and was conveyed through the gate of the town which leads to Spandau.

At a short distance from the town the horsemen turned back; the carriage made a circuit and proceeded in another direction. After a long journey by horsemen, and by a narrow and winding road, they arrived at a small village, where they were met by a man in a black coat, who handed him a small packet, and then returned to the carriage, which drove off rapidly in the direction which he had come.

Lane stood like a man awakening from a terrible dream. He looked doubtfully at the departing carriage, then at the Saxon footier which lay before him, and then at the little packet in his hand. It contained his discharge from the Prussian service, made out in the name of Carl Gottlieb Lane; also there was an order prohibiting the king's name from being mentioned in connection with the name of Carl Gottlieb Lane; also there was an order prohibiting the king's name from being mentioned in connection with the name of Carl Gottlieb Lane.

Lane was transfixed with surprise. This sudden deliverance from evil and restoration to liberty ought to have made him happy; as it was, it had the opposite effect. He looked at the packet with a gloomy and thoughtful expression, and he felt as if he were in a state of suspense.

Lane looked round; he felt no surprise—no many strange things had happened to him. He had not been before his face; he could not bear to look at what seemed to be Agnes—she was now married to his bitter enemy. Suddenly two loving arms were thrown round him, and a voice tremulous with joy, half sobbing and half triumphant exclaimed—

"Oh, Librecht, my husband! is it indeed you?"

"As Agnes could not reach her husband's neck, she could only lay her head against his breast. The giant, looking down upon her, and said, loudly, 'I think you are Bertram's wife.'"

"No, no! I thank God, my Librecht, no! God saved me on the very brink of the precipice. Thanks be to Him for our deliverance!"

Then the tall giant bent down, and the happiness of that moment effaced all the misery and grief they had both endured.

Stagnant, the market-merchant, and Bertram joined their voices in choruses of rejoicing and exultation. Librecht and Agnes got into the carriage, and all were driven back on the road to Frankfurt.

Surely the angels who see so much human suffering, must have rejoiced over this spectacle of recovered happiness. The old Saxon frontier, which had been the refuge of a few hunted deserters, had never been the scene of such a meeting, such a restoration—as from the depth of the grave.

There is little more to be told. The joy of the dear old mother and of the children, who were not described, as they were in the arms of their father, and the first time how much he was esteemed and beloved.

The punishment of Bitterman would have been severe, but he eluded justice—he flung himself into the river, and his body was found brought on shore, and received the burial of a suicide and a malefactor. He left no one to regret him.

Librecht sent intelligence to his friends in Berlin of his happy restoration to his family, accompanied with handsome presents to all who had helped him; even the great Corporal Wimmer was not forgotten, who did not cease to regret the loss of the friend who had been his benefactor.

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