

Marshal Blücher

By the Rev. Bouchier Wrey Savile

In the autumn of the year in which Waterloo had been fought, Marshal Blücher quitted France for the last time. Chagrined at finding himself reduced to a life of inaction, he retired to his property, and fell into a state of melancholy, increased by an attack of dropsy on the chest. From this time a change came over his character; the rough and ready soldier became timid, and even nervous. He would not remain in the dark; solitude was agonising, and such was the uneasiness caused by his failing health, that the King of Prussia (father of the present Emperor of Germany) started for Kriebowitz as soon as he learned that his old and favourite general had several times expressed a wish to see him before dying. The king arrived in the evening at the castle, and was instantly conducted to Blücher, then in his seventy-fourth year.

On seeing the king, Marshal Blücher tried to rise for the purpose of receiving His Majesty, who kindly prevented him, and sat down by his side; when the old soldier, after dismissing his attendants, spoke as follows:—

“Sire, I entreated you to come here, as I heard you were in the neighbourhood, yet had you been at the other extremity of Europe, dying as I am now, I must have endeavoured to have reached you, for I have a terrible secret to reveal. Sire, be pleased to look at me well, and assure yourself that I am now in the full enjoyment of my reason, and that I am not mad; for at times I almost think I am deluded into mistaking recollections of past events for visions of the present war. But no, I cannot doubt! It must be true.

“When, Sire, in 1756, the Seven Years’ War broke out, my father who lived on his estate of Gross Renson, sent me to one of our relations, the Princess Krauswick, in the Isle of Rugen. I was then fourteen, and after a time passed in the old fortress without news from my family, I entered a regiment of hussars in the Swedish service, and being taken prisoner at Suokow, the Prussian Government pressed me to take service in its army. For a year I resisted, and only obtained my liberty by accepting the rank of cornet in the regiment of Black Hussars. I then obtained leave for some months, as I was very anxious concerning my mother and sisters, and started at once for Gross Renson, which had been the scene of war during my year’s imprisonment

“It is just fifty-nine years ago, this very day, the 12th August (1816), and about the same hour I am speaking to your majesty, verging toward midnight, when in the midst of a raging storm, and after long wandering in the forest, I reached my father’s house, drenched to the skin and alone, for my servant, bewildered by the tempest, had lost me in the darkness of the night. Without dismounting, I struck the nail-studded oaken door with the butt end of my whip. No one replied, though I hammered again and again at the door; until, losing all patience, I jumped off my horse, when the door appeared to open of its own accord, as I could perceive no one, and I entered; and hurrying up the steps, quickly penetrated the interior.

“There was no light to be seen or sound heard. I confess that my heart sank within me, and a cold shudder ran through my veins. ‘What folly!’ I exclaimed; ‘the house must be empty; my family must have left when I quitted it, and have not returned, still I must remain for the night.’ I reached my father’s bedroom; a faint and fitful flame threw a dim light upon a group of persons seated, amongst whom I recognised my father, mother, and four sisters, who rose on seeing me enter. I was about to throw myself into my father’s arms, when he arrested me by a solemn

gesture. I held out my arms to my mother, but she retreated with a mournful air. I called out to my sisters, who, taking each other by the hand, again seated themselves.

“Do you not know me?” I cried. “Is it thus you receive me after so long a separation? Do you not know that I am now serving Prussia? I was compelled to make the sacrifice in order to regain my liberty, and to see you. But no one responds to my affection. My mother, you are silent I My sisters, have you forgotten the love of our childhood, and the games of which these walls have been the silent witnesses?”

“At these last words my sisters seemed to be moved, and they spoke to one another in a low voice: they rose up and signalled to me to approach. One of them then knelt down before my mother, and hid her face in her lap, as if she wished to play at a game called ‘Hot-kok-hiry’ (a childish game, where one has his eyes bound, and guesses who strikes with the flat of the hand). Surprised at this strange freak at such a solemn time, I nevertheless touched my sister’s hand with the whip that I still grasped, as a mysterious force seemed to impel me so to do. Then came my turn to kneel before my mother, and to hide my face in her lap.

“Oh, horror! I felt through her silk dress a cold angular form; I heard a sound of rattling bones; and when a hand was placed in mine, the hand remained there; and it was the hand of a skeleton! I arose with a cry of terror; all had disappeared, and there only remained to me of this dreadful vision the human remains which I convulsively grasped.

“Almost beside myself, I ran from the chamber, hurried downstairs, jumped on my horse, and galloped wildly through the forest. At daybreak my horse sank beneath me and expired. I fell insensible at the foot of a large tree, and was found there by my attendants with skull fractured. I almost died from the combined effects of horror of mind and the injury in my head, and it was only after some weeks of fever and delirium that I regained my senses, and gradually recovered.

“It was then I learned that all my family had perished in the terrible war which had desolated Mecklenburg, and that my father’s castle had been several times pillaged and sacked. Scarcely convalescent, I hastened to the castle to render the last rites to my deceased parents and sisters; but after a most rigorous search no trace of their remains could be found, save one hand only—a female hand, surrounded by a golden bracelet, lay on the floor of the room in which the fatal apparition had appeared to me. I took the golden chain—the same, your majesty, which I now hold in my hands—and deposited the hand, all that remained of my family, in the oratory chapel.

“Many years have glided by since that awful scene which I witnessed in my father’s castle; and it was only two months ago, while lying in this arm-chair, a slight noise awoke me. I looked up. There stood my father, mother, and four sisters around, just as they appeared on that awful night at the castle of Gross Reason. My sisters commenced playing at the same game, and signalled me to advance. ‘Never! never!’ I exclaimed; and then the apparitions, joining hands, passed slowly around my chair. ‘Justice!’ cried my father, as he passed before me; ‘Penitence!’ exclaimed my mother, leaning towards me; ‘Prayer!’ murmured my youngest sister; ‘The sword!’ sighed another; ‘The 12th of August, at midnight!’ whispered the eldest. Again the procession moved slowly around me thrice; then, with one terrible roar, they all cried out together, ‘Adieu! adieu! to our next meeting!’

“I felt then it was a warning of my approaching death, and that I had only to look to God to receive my soul, and bid farewell to your majesty and friends.”

“My dear Marshall” said the king, “what you have related to me is very strange; still, do you not think the vision may have been caused by delirium? Take courage, strive against these hallucinations, and you will rally and live many years yet. Will you not try and believe what I say? Give me your hand.”

The king, receiving no answer, took the old man's hand. It was icy cold. Just then the old clock on the mantelpiece struck the midnight hour. The spirit of Marshal Blücher had quietly passed away.