had adopted her Eugene as his son, and had given to this son a wife of royal extraction, Fate would be propitious to her; that the emperor would be satisfied with the son of his choice, and that the future scions of the royal princess would be the heirs of his throne.

But one word of Napoleon frightened her out of this ephemeral security into which happiness had lulled her.

Josephine wept as she bade farewell to her son; she was comfortless when with his young wife Eugene left for Italy. She complained to Napoleon, in justification of her tears, that she should seldom see her son, that now he was lost to his mother's heart.

The emperor, who at first had endeavored to comfort her, felt at last wounded by her sorrow.

"You weep, Josephine," said he, hastily, "but you have no reasonable motives to do so; you weep simply because you are separated from your son. If already the absence of your children causes you so much sorrow, think then what I must endure! The tenderness which you feel for your children makes me cruelly experience how unhappy it is for me to have none." *

Josephine trembled, and her tears ceased flowing in the presence of the emperor, but only to fall more abundantly as soon as he had left her. Now she wept no longer at her separation from her son; her tears were still more bitter and painful—she grieved over the coming future; she wept because those voices which happiness for a moment had deafened, now spoke more loudly—more fearfully and menacingly shouted: "Napoleon will reject you! He will choose for himself a wife of royal birth, who will give an heir to his throne and his empire."

* Avrillon, "Mémoires sur l'Impératrice Joséphine," vol. i., p. 202.

CHAPTER XLII.

DIVORCE.

It was at last decided! The storm which had so long and so fearfully rolled over Josephine's head was to burst, and with one single flash destroy her earthly happiness, her love, her future!

The peace of Vienna had been ratified on the 13th of October, 1809. Napoleon passed the three long months of peace negotiations in Vienna and in Schönbrunn, while Josephine, solitary and full of sad misgivings, lived quietly in the retreat of Malmaison.

Now that peace was signed, Napoleon returned to France with fresh laurels and new crowns of victory. But not, as usual after so long an absence, did he greet Josephine with the tenderness and joy of a home-returning husband. He approached her with clouded brow; with a proud, cold demeanor; with the mien of a ruling master, before whom all must bow, even his wife, even his own heart.

At Fontainebleau, whither the emperor in a few, short, commanding words—in a letter of three lines—had invited the empress, did the first interview of Josephine and Napoleon take place. She hastened to meet her husband with a cheerful face and beaming eyes. He, however, received her coldly, and endeavored to hide his feelings of uneasiness and shame under a repulsive, domineering manner.

He returned to his home victorious; the whole world lay conquered at his feet; he was triumphant. He had so deeply humiliated the pride of Austria that she not only accepted his harsh terms of peace, but, as once men had appeased the Minotaur by the sacrifice of the most amiable and most beautiful maiden, so Austria had asked in a low voice whether the daughter of the emperor, Maria Louisa,

might not give to the alliance of Austria and France the consecration of love. Napoleon eagerly entered into the scheme; and while Josephine, as his married wife before God and man, stood yet at his side, he already had begun negotiations, the object of which was to make the daughter of the Austrian emperor his wife, and before Napoleon returned to France those negotiations had been brought to a satisfactory result.

The ambitious Maria Louisa was to be the wife of the Emperor of the French. Nothing more was wanted but that Napoleon should reject his legitimate wife, whom the pope had anointed! He had but to disenthrone her who for fifteen years, with true and tender love, had shared his existence. He had only to be divorced publicly and solemnly, so as immediately to possess a bride, the daughter of an emperor!

Napoleon came to Fontainebleau to accomplish this cruel task, to break at once his marriage with Josephine and her heart. He knew what terrible sufferings he was preparing for her; he himself quailed under the anguish she was to endure; his heart was full of sorrow and woe, and yet his resolution was irrevocable. Policy had controlled his heart, ambition had conquered his love, and the man was determined to sacrifice his wife to the emperor.

Josephine felt this at the first word he addressed her, at the first look he gave her, after so long a separation, and her heart shrank within itself in bitter anguish, while a stream of tears started from her eyes.

But Napoleon asked not for the cause of these tears; he had not the courage to wage an open war with this brave, loving heart, and to subdue her love and despair with the two-edged sword of his state policy and craftiness. He did not wish to utter the word; he wanted to make her feel what an abyss was now open between them; all confidential and social intercourse was to be avoided, so that the empress

might become conscious that love and fellowship of hearts had ceased also.

On the evening after the first interview the empress found that the door of communication between her apartments and those of the emperor had been closed. Napoleon did not, as had been his wont, bid her good-night with a cordial and friendly kiss, but, in the presence of her ladies, he dismissed her with a cold salutation. The next day the emperor expressly avoided her society; and when at rare moments he was with her, he was so taciturn, so morose and cold, that the empress had not the courage to ask for an explanation, or to reproach him, but, trembling and afraid, she bowed under the iron pressure of his severe, angry looks.

To prevent their being with each other alone, and to avoid this horrible solitude, dreaded alike by Napoleon and Josephine, the emperor sent the next day for all the princes and princesses of his family to come to Fontainebleau. His sisters, no longer kept in control by the domineering will of the emperor, made Josephine feel their malice and enmity; they found pleasure in letting the empress see their own ascendency, their secure position, and in treating her with coldness and disrespect. The emperor, instead of guarding Josephine against these humiliations, had the cruel courage to increase them; for, without reserve or modesty, and in the very presence of Josephine, he offered the most familiar and positive attentions to two ladies of his court—ladies whom he honored with special favor.*

It was death-like agony which Josephine suffered in those days of Fontainebleau; it was a cruel martyrdom, which she, however, endured with all the gentleness of her nature, with the devotedness and uncomplaining anguish of true and genuine love.

* Thiers, "Histoire du Consulat et de l'Empire," vol. xi., p. 323.

Napoleon could not endure this. The sight of this yet beloved pale face, with its sweet, angelic smile, lacerated his heart and tortured him with reproaches. He wanted to have festivities and amusements, so as not to witness this quiet, devoted anguish, so as not to read every day in the sorrowful, red eyes of Josephine, the story of nights passed in tears.

The court returned to Paris, there to celebrate the new victorious peace with brilliant feasts. Napoleon, so as to be delivered from the tearful companionship of Josephine, made the journey on horseback, and never once rode near her carriage.

In Paris had begun at once a series of festivities, at which German princes, the Kings of Saxony, of Bavaria, and of Würtemberg, were present, to congratulate Napoleon on his victories in Germany. The Empress Josephine, by virtue of her rank, had to appear at these receptions; she had, although in the deepest despondency, to wear a smile on her lip, to appear as empress at the side of the man who met her with coldness and estrangement, and whom she yet loved with the true love of a wife! She had to see the courtiers, with the keen instinct of their race, desert her, leaving around her person an insulting void and vacancy. Her heart was tortured with anguish and woe, and yet she could not uproot her love from it; she did not have the courage to speak the decisive word, and to desire the divorce which she knew hung over her, and which at any moment might agonize her heart!

Josephine did not possess the cowardice to commit suicide; she was ready to receive the fatal blow, but she could not plunge the dagger into her own heart.

Napoleon, unable to endure these tortures, longed to bring them to an end. He secretly made all the necessary arrangements, and communicated to the first chancellor, Cambacérès, his irrevocable resolution to be divorced from

the empress. He, however, notified him that he wanted this act of separation to be accomplished in the most respectful and honorable form for Josephine, and he therefore, with Cambacérès, prepared and decided upon all the details of this public divorce.

It only remained now to find some one who would announce to Josephine her fate, who would communicate to her the emperor's determination. Napoleon had not the courage to do it himself, and he wanted to confide this duty to the Vice-King Eugene, whom for this purpose he had invited to Paris.

But Eugene declined to become a messenger of evil tidings to his mother; and when Napoleon turned to Hortense, she refused to give to her mother's heart the mortal stroke. The emperor, deeply touched by the sorrow manifested by the children of Josephine, was not able to repress his tears. He wept with them over their blasted happiness —their betrayed love. But his tears could not make him swerve from his resolution.

"The nation has done so much for me," said he, "that I owe it the sacrifice of my dearest inclinations. The peace of France demands that I choose a new companion. Since, for many months, the empress has lived in the torments of uncertainty, and every thing is now ready for a new marriage, we must therefore come to a final explanation." *

But as none could be found to carry this fatal news to Josephine, Napoleon had to take upon himself the unwelcome task.

Wearied with the tears of the slighted empress, with the reproaches of his own conscience and with his own sufferings, Napoleon suddenly broke the sad, gloomy silence which had been so long maintained between him and his wife; in answer to her tears and reproaches, he told her that it was

* Lavalette, "Mémoires," vol. ii., p. 44.

full time now to arrive at a final conclusion; that he had resolved to form new ties; that the interest of the state demanded from them both an enormous sacrifice; that he reckoned on her courage and devotedness to consent to a divorce, to which he himself acceded only with the greatest reluctance.*

But Josephine did not hear the last words. At the word divorce she swooned with a death-like shriek; and Napoleon, alarmed at the sight of her insensibility, called out to the officers in waiting to help him to carry the empress into her rooms upon her bed.

Such hours of despair, of bitter pain, of writhing, agonized love did Josephine now endure! How courageous, yet how difficult, the struggle against the wretchedness of a rejected love! How angrily and scornfully she would rise up against her cruel fate! How lovingly, humbly, gently she would acquiesce in it, as to a long-expected, inevitable fatality!

These were long days of pain and distress; but Josephine was not alone in her sufferings, for the emperor's heart was also touched with her quiet endurance, and her deep agony at this separation.

At last the empress came out victorious from these conflicts of heart and soul, and she repressed her tears with the firm will of a noble, loving woman! She bade her son Eugene announce to the emperor that she assented to the divorce on two conditions: first, that her own offspring should not be exiled or rejected, but that they should still remain Napoleon's adopted children, and maintain their rank and position at his court; secondly, that she should be allowed to remain in France, and, if possible, in the vicinity of Paris, so that, as she said with a sweet smile, she might be near the emperor, and still hope in the pleasure of seeing him.

* Thiers, "Histoire du Consulat," vol. xi., p. 340.

DIVORCED.

Napoleon's countenance manifested violent agitation when Eugene communicated to him his mother's conditions; for a long time he paced the room to and fro, his hands behind his back, and unable to gather strength enough to return an answer. Then, with a trembling voice, he said that he not only granted all these conditions, but that they corresponded entirely with the wishes of his heart, and that he would add to them a third condition, namely, that Josephine should still be honored and treated by him and by the world as empress, and that she should still be surrounded with all the honors belonging to that rank.

There was yet wanting, for the full offering of the sacrifice, the public and solemn act of divorcement; but before that could take place it was necessary to make the requisite preparations, to arrange the future household of the divorced empress, and to prepare every thing for Josephine's reception in Malmaison, whither she desired to retire from the world. The mournful solemnity was put off until the 15th of December, and until then Josephine, according to the rules of etiquette, was to appear before the world as the ruling empress, the wife of Napoleon. Twice it was necessary to perform the painful duty of appearing publicly in all the pomp of her imperial dignity, and to wear the heavy burden of that crown which already had fallen from her head. On the morning of the 3d of December she had to be present at the chanting of the Te Deum in Notre Dame, in thanksgiving for the peace of Vienna, and to appear at the ball which the city of Paris that same evening gave to the emperor and empress.

This ball was the last festivity which Josephine attended as empress, but even then she received not all the honors which were due to her as such. Napoleon himself had given orders that the ladies of Paris, gathered in the Hôtel de Ville, with the wife of the governor of the capital, and the Duchess d'Abrantes at their head, should not, as usual,

meet the empress at the foot of the stairs, but that they should quietly await her approach in the throne-room, while the marshal of ceremonies would alone accompany her up the stairs.

The Duchess d'Abrantes, deeply affected by this order of the emperor, which at once revealed the sad secret of the approaching future, had reluctantly to submit to this arrangement, which so cruelly broke the established etiquette. She has herself, in her memoirs, given full particulars of this evening, and her words are so touching and so full of sentiment that we cannot refuse to make them known here:

"We, therefore," says she,* "ascended the throne-room, and were no sooner seated, than the drums began to beat, and the empress entered. I shall never forget that figure, in the costume which so marvellously suited her . . . never will this gentle face, now wrapped in mourning crape, fade away from my memory. It was evident that she was not prepared for the solitude which she had found on the grand staircase; and yet Junot, in spite of the risk of being blamed by the emperor, went to receive her, and he had even managed that the empress should meet on the stairs a few ladies who, it is true, did not very well know how they came and what they had to do there. The empress, however, was not deceived; as she entered the grand hall and approached the throne on which, in the presence of the public of the capital, she was to sit probably for the last time . . . . her feet trembled and her eyes filled with tears. . . . . I tried to catch her eyes; I would willingly have sunk at her feet and told her how much I suffered. . . . She understood me, and looked at me with the most agonizing gaze which perhaps was ever in her eyes since that now blighted crown had been placed on her head. That look

* Abrantes, "Mémoires," vol. xii., p. 289.

spoke of agony—it revealed depths of sorrow! . . . . What must she have suffered on this awful day! . . . . She felt wretched, dying, and yet she smiled! Oh, what a torture was that crown! . . . . Junot stood by her.

"'You were not afraid of Jupiter's wrath,' said I to him afterward.

"'No,' said he, with a gloomy look, 'no, I fear him not, when he is wrong. . . .'

"The drums beat a second time; they announced the emperor's approach. . . . A few minutes after he came in, walking rapidly, and accompanied by the Queen of Naples and the King of Westphalia. The heat was extraordinary, though it was cold out of doors. The Queen of Naples, whose gracious, charming smile seemed to demand from the Parisians the salutation, 'Welcome to Paris,' spoke to every one, and with the expression of uncommon goodness. Napoleon, also, who wished to appear friendly, walked up and down the room, talking and questioning, followed by Berthier, who fairly skipped at his side, fulfilling more the duties of a chamberlain than those of a *connétable*. A trifling circumstance in reference to Berthier struck me. The emperor, who for some time had been seated on his arm-chair near the empress, descended the steps of the throne to go once more around the hall; at the moment he rose I saw him bend down toward the empress, probably to tell her that she was to accompany him. He rose up first; Berthier, who had stood behind him, rushed on to follow his master; the empress was already standing up, when his feet caught in the train of her mantle, and he nearly fell down, causing the empress almost to fall. However, he disentangled himself, and, without one word of excuse to the empress, he followed the emperor. Certainly Berthier had not the intention to be wanting in respect to the empress; but he knew the secret—he knew the whole drama soon to be performed, ... and assuredly he would not have so

acted one year ago as he did to-day. . . . . The empress had remained standing with a marvellous dignity; she smiled as if the accident was the result of mere awkwardness . . . . but her eyes were full of tears, and her lips trembled. . . ."

At last the 15th of December had come; the day on which Josephine was to endure the most cruel agony of her life, the day on which she was solemnly to descend from the throne and bid farewell to her whole brilliant past, and commence a despised, lonely, gloomy future.

In the large cabinet of ceremonies were gathered on this day, at noon, the emperor, the Empress Josephine, the emperor's mother, the King and Queen of Holland, the King and Queen of Westphalia, the King and Queen of Naples, the Vice-king Eugene, the Princess Pauline Borghese, the high-chancellor Cambacérès, and the secretary of civil affairs, St. Jean d'Angely. Josephine was pale and trembling; her children were agitated, and hiding their tears under an appearance of quietude, so as to instil courage into their mother.

Napoleon, standing upright, his hand in that of the empress, read with tremulous voice:

"My cousin, prince state-chancellor, I have dispatched you an order to summon you hither into my cabinet for the purpose of communicating to you the resolution which I and the empress, my much-beloved wife, have taken. I am rejoiced that the kings, queens, and princesses, my brothers and sisters, my brothers-in-law and sisters-in-law, my daughter-in-law and my son-in-law, who also is my adopted son, as well as my mother, are here present to hear what I have to say.

"The policy of my empire, the interest and wants of my people, direct all my actions, and now demand that I should leave children heirs of the love I have for my people, and heirs of this throne to which Providence has exalted me.

However, for many years past, I have lost the hope of having children through the marriage of my beloved wife, the Empress Josephine; and this obliges me to sacrifice the sweetest inclinations of my heart, so as to consult only the welfare of the state, and for that cause to desire the dissolution of my marriage.

"Already advanced to my fortieth year, I still may hope to live long enough to bring up in my sentiments and thoughts the children whom it may please Providence to give me. God knows how much this resolution has cost my heart; but there is no sacrifice too great for my courage if it can be shown to me that such a sacrifice is necessary to the welfare of France.

"It is necessary for me to add that, far from having any cause of complaint, I have, contrariwise, but to praise the devotedness and affection of my much-beloved wife; she has embellished fifteen years of my life; the remembrance of these years will therefore ever remain engraven on my heart. She has been crowned at my hands; it is my will that she retain the rank and title of empress, and especially that she never doubt my sentiments, and that she ever hold me as her best and dearest friend."

When he came to the words "she has embellished fifteen years of my life," tears started to Napoleon's eyes, and, with a voice trembling through emotion, he read the concluding words.

It was now Josephine's turn. She began to read the paper which had been prepared for her:

"With the permission of our mighty and dear husband, I must declare that, whereas I can no longer cherish the hope of having children to meet the wants of his policy and the wants of France, I am ready to give the highest proof of affection and devotedness which was ever given upon earth. . . ."

Josephine could proceed no further; sobs choked her

voice. She tried to continue, but her trembling lips could no more utter a word. She handed to Count St. Jean d'Angely the paper, who, with tremulous voice, read as follows:

"I have obtained every thing from his goodness; his hand has crowned me, and on the exaltation of this throne I have received only proofs of the sympathy and love of the French people.

"I believe it is but manifesting my gratitude for these sentiments when I consent to the dissolution of a marriage which is an obstacle to the welfare of France, since it deprives her of the happiness of being one day ruled by the posterity of a great man, whom Providence has so manifestly favored, as through him to bring to an end the horrors of a terrible revolution, and to re-establish the altar, the throne, and social order. The dissolution of my marriage will not, however, alter the sentiments of my heart; the emperor will always find in me his most devoted friend. I know how much this action, made incumbent upon him by policy and by the great interests in view, has troubled his heart; but we, the one and the other, are proud of the sacrifice which we offer to the welfare of our country."

When he had finished, Napoleon, visibly affected, embraced Josephine, took her hand, and led her back to her apartments, where he soon left her insensible in the arms of her children.*

Napoleon himself, sad and silent, returned to his cabinet, where, in a state of complete exhaustion, he fell into an easy-chair.

On the evening of the same day he again visited Josephine, to pass a few hours with her in quiet, undisturbed communion; to speak in tenderness and love of the future, to weep with her, and, full of deepest emotion and sincerity,

* Thiers, "Histoire du Consulat," etc., vol. xi., p. 349.

to assure her of his undying gratitude for the past, and of his abiding friendship for the future.

Josephine passed the night in tears, struggling with her heart, sometimes breaking into bitter complaints and reproaches, which she immediately repressed with that gentleness and mildness so much her own, and with that love which never for a moment departed from her breast.

There remained yet to perform the last, the most painful scene of this great, tearful drama. Josephine had to leave the Tuileries; she had forever to retire from the place which she so long had occupied at her husband's side; she had to descend into the open grave of her mournful abandonment; as a widow, to part with the corpse of her love and of the past, and to put on mourning apparel for a husband who was not yet dead, but who only rejected her to give his hand and his heart to another woman.

The next day at two o'clock, the moment had come for Josephine to leave the Tuileries, to make room for the yet unknown wife of the future. Napoleon wanted to leave Paris at the same moment, and pass a few days of quiet and solitude in Trianon.

The carriages of the emperor and empress were both ready; the last farewell of husband and wife, now to part forever, had yet to be said. M. de Meneval, who was the sole witness of those sad moments, gives of them a most affecting description, which bears upon its face the merit of truth and impartiality.

"When it was announced to the emperor that the carriage was ready, he stood up, took his hat, and said: 'Meneval, come with me.'

"I followed him through the narrow winding stairs which led from his room into that of the empress. She was alone, and seemed absorbed in the saddest thoughts. At the noise we made in entering she rose up and eagerly threw herself, sobbing, upon the neck of the emperor, who drew

her to his breast and embraced her several times; but Josephine, overcome by excitement, had fainted. I hastened to ring for assistance. The emperor, to avoid the renewal of a painful scene, which it was not in his power to prevent, placed the empress in my arms as soon as he perceived her senses return, and ordered me not to leave her, and then he hurried away through the halls of the first story, at whose gate his carriage was waiting. Josephine became immediately conscious of the emperor's absence; her tears and sobs redoubled. Her women, who had now entered, laid her on a sofa, and busied themselves with tender solicitude to bring her relief. In her bewilderment she had seized my hands, and urgently entreated me to tell the emperor not to forget her, and to assure him of her devotedness, which would outlast every trial. I had to promise her that at my arrival in Trianon I would wait upon the emperor and see that he would write to her. It caused her pain to see me leave, as if my departure tore away the last bond which united her to the emperor. I left her, deeply affected by so true a sorrow and by so sincere a devotion. During the whole journey I was deeply moved, and could not but bewail the merciless political considerations which tore violently apart the bonds of so faithful an affection for the sake of contracting a new union, which, after all, contained but uncertain chances.

"In Trianon I told the emperor all that had happened since his departure, and I conveyed to him the message intrusted to me by the empress. The emperor was still suffering from the emotions caused by this farewell scene. He spoke warmly of Josephine's qualities, of the depth and sincerity of the sentiments she cherished for him; he looked upon her as a devoted friend, and, in fact, he has ever maintained for her a heart-felt affection. The very same evening he sent her a letter to console her in her solitude. When he learned that she was sad and wept much, he wrote to her again, complained tenderly of her want of courage, and told her how deeply this troubled him."*

It is true Josephine's sorrow was bitter, and the first night of solitude in Malmaison was especially distressing and horrible. But even in these hours of painful struggle the empress maintained her gentleness and mildness of character. Mademoiselle d'Avrillon, one of the ladies in waiting, has given her testimony to that effect:

"I was with the empress during the greater part of the night," writes she; "sleep was impossible, and time passed away in conversation. The empress was moved to the very depth of her heart; it is true, she complained of her fate, but in expressions so gentle, in so resigned a manner, that tears would come to her eyes. There was no bitterness in her words, not even during this first night when the blow which destroyed her, had fallen upon her; she spoke of the emperor with the same love, with the same respect, as she had always done. Her grief was most acute: she suffered as a wife, as a mother, and with all the wounded sensitiveness of a woman, but she endured her affliction with courage, and remained unchanged in gentleness, love, and goodness."†

CHAPTER XLIII.

THE DIVORCED.

JOSEPHINE had accepted her fate, and, descending from the imperial throne whose ornament she had long been, retired into the solitude and quietness of private life.

* Meneval, "Napoléon et Marie Louise.—Souvenirs Historiques," vol. i., pp. 230–232.

† Avrillon, "Mémoires," vol. ii., p. 166.