

CHAPTER VII.

The choice of a new empress.—Josephine's experience.—Napoleon's power shaken.—The birth of a prince.—Propositions of peace with England.—War with Russia.—His progress to Dresden.—He reaches Dantzic.—The Grand Army cross the Niemen.—The Poles hail the presence of the emperor with hope.—The Russian method of destruction to the enemy.—Napoleon enters Moscow.—He occupies the Kremlin.—Letter to Alexander.—Conflagration of Moscow.—The retreat.—The march to Smolensk.—Conspiracy in Paris.—Marshal Ney.—His supposed death—His rescue.—The wasting army reach the Beresina.—The tragical crossing of the river Wilna.—Napoleon returns to Paris.—Reaches the palace at night.—The rear-guard of the Grand Army.

THE choice of a new Empress of France lay mainly between Austria and Russia. Alexander desired the alliance because he anticipated conditions which would advance his designs against the restoration of Poland, and especially those upon Constantinople. After consulting his Privy Council, a majority of whom favored the Austrian princess, Napoleon opened negotiations with Francis. Berthier, in behalf of his sovereign, received her hand at Vienna, and the marriage was celebrated, March 10, 1810, in that capital, with great splendor. The bride commenced her journey to France, amid the exultation of the people. Napoleon hastened to take her by surprise. Disregarding the order of arrangements, he rode toward Soissons, and as her carriage approached, leaving his own, sprang into the presence of Maria Louisa. Surprised and pleased at his enthusiasm, she said as soon as the excitement passed: "Your Majesty's pictures have not done you justice." Napoleon was forty years of age,

the empress eighteen—both fine-looking, and in perfect health.

The following distich, which a burgomaster of Holland placed on a triumphal arch erected to Napoleon, is well known:

"Il n'a pas fait une sottise
En épousant Marie-Louise."*

Napoleon had no sooner read this singular inscription, than he sent for the burgomaster. "Mr. Mayor," said he, "you cultivate the French muses here!" "Sire, I compose a little." "Ah! it's you, then! Do you take snuff?" added he, on presenting him a snuff-box enriched with diamonds. "Yes, sir; but I—" "Take it, take it—box and all! And

"Quand vous prendrez une prise,
Rappelez-vous Marie-Louise."†

They spent the evening at the Chateau of Compeigne, where it was expected they would first meet, and April 1st, the marriage which was virtually consummated according to Austrian statutes, was formally and civilly celebrated at St. Cloud. The following day the grand entry was made into Paris. He acted the part of a devoted lover, but could not and did not forget Josephine. He endeavored in vain to induce Maria Louisa to become acquainted with the former wife of Napoleon—still the queen of his heart.

Malmaison had fallen much into decay during the years of change in the empire. To restore the departed grandeur and beauty was Josephine's new employment, which was a double source of delight, in furnishing

* "He has not done a foolish thing
In marrying Marie-Louise."

† "When you shall take a pinch of snuff
Remember Marie-Louise."

entertainment to herself, and a means of benevolence in the labors of the poor peasantry. Bonaparte gave her a million of francs, or forty-one thousand pounds sterling, on her retirement, as a part of her allowance, which she devoted entirely to this object. Soon the wilderness of decay "blossomed as the rose"; the waters sparkled and murmured along their channels, and slumbered in their boundaries fringed with foliage—the sunny slopes were gay with flowers, and the wide fields alive with the laborers, who were grateful for toil, if it purchased bread. In the center of this miniature kingdom, the ex-empress lived more secluded than before, and consequently more in unison with her taste. There were less parade, and fewer guests, but more freedom and greater intimacy of friendship.

Yet Josephine felt not a thrill of joy amid all this change, unless upon receiving words of love from Napoleon, or at the gladness of others. The words of inspiration were deeply her experience: "Every heart knows its own *bitterness!*" There is nothing more sad in life's changes, than the suffering of the innocent for the guilty; the unuttered grief of a bosom another has robbed of hope—the slow death of one who has a wounded spirit. But such are the woes that make the pastime of half the world. The millionaire rides in a gilded chariot bought with the gains that made tears fall like rain—the man with a little brief authority walks unmoved upon the prostrate form of another whom he fears or hates—and in a thousand homes, woman is a secluded martyr to the vice and caprice of a heartless ruffian.

To Josephine, this view of earth, after the completed work of desolation, which banished her from St. Cloud, became naturally the habitual one, as expressed in a letter to Bonaparte:

"Sire—I received, this morning, the welcome note which was written on the eve of your departure for St. Cloud, and hasten to reply to its tender and affectionate contents. These, indeed, do not in themselves surprise me; but only as being received so early as fifteen days after my establishment here; so perfectly assured was I that your attachment would search out the means of consoling me under a separation necessary to the tranquillity of both. The thought that your care follows me into my retreat renders it almost agreeable.

"After having known all the sweets of a love that is shared, and all the suffering of one that is so no longer; after having exhausted all the pleasures that supreme power can confer, and the happiness of beholding the man whom I loved, enthusiastically admired, is there aught else, save repose, to be desired? What illusions can now remain for me? All such vanished when it became necessary to renounce you. Thus, the only ties which yet bind me to life are my sentiments for you, attachment for my children, the possibility of being able still to do some good, and above all, the assurance that you are happy. Do not, then, condole with me on my being here, distant from a court which you appear to think I regret. Surrounded by those who are attached to me, free to follow my taste for the arts, I find myself better at Navarre than anywhere else; for I enjoy more completely the society of the former, and form a thousand projects which may prove useful to the latter, and will embellish the scenes I owe to your bounty. There is much to be done here, for all around are discovered the traces of destruction; these I would efface, that there may exist no memorial of those horrible inflictions which your genius has taught the nation almost to

forget. In repairing whatever these ruffians of revolution labored to annihilate, I shall diffuse comfort around me; and the benedictions of the poor will afford me infinitely more pleasure than the feigned adulations of courtiers.

“I have already told you what I think of the functionaries in this department, but have not spoken sufficiently of the respectable bishop (M. Bourlier). Every day I learn some new trait, which causes me still more highly to esteem the man who unites the most enlightened benevolence with the most amiable dispositions. He shall be entrusted with distributing my alms-deeds in Evreux; and as he visits the indigent himself, I shall be assured that my charities are properly bestowed.

“I cannot sufficiently thank you, sire, for the liberty you have permitted me of choosing the members of my household, all of whom contribute to the pleasure of a delightful society. One circumstance alone gives me pain, namely, the etiquette of costume, which becomes a little tiresome in the country. You fear that there may be something wanting to the rank I have preserved, should a slight infraction be allowed in the toilet of these gentlemen; but I believe you are wrong in thinking they would, for one minute, forget the respect due to the woman who was your companion. Their respect for yourself, joined to the sincere attachment they bear to me (which I cannot doubt), secures me against the danger of being obliged to recall what it is your wish they should remember. My most honorable title is derived, not from having been crowned, but assuredly from having been chosen by you—none other is of value—that alone suffices for my immortality.

“I expect Eugene. I doubly long to see him; for he will doubtless bring me a new pledge of your re-

membrance; and I can question him at my ease of a thousand things concerning which I desire to be informed, but cannot inquire of you; things, too, of which you ought still less to speak to me. My daughter will come also, but later, her health not permitting her to travel at this season. I beseech you, sire, to recommend that she take care of herself; and insist, since I am to remain here, that she do everything possible to spare me the insupportable anxiety I feel under any increase of her ill-health. The weakness in her chest alarms me beyond all expression. I desire Corvisart to write me his opinion without reserve.

“My circle is at this time somewhat more numerous than usual, there being several visitors, besides many of the inhabitants of Evreux and the environs, whom I see of course. I am pleased with their manners, and with their admiration of you, a particular in which, as you know, I am not easily satisfied; in short, I find myself perfectly at home in the midst of my forest, and entreat you, sire, no longer to fancy to yourself that there is no living at a distance from court. Besides you, there is nothing there I regret, since I shall have my children with me soon, and already enjoy the society of the small number of friends who remained faithful to me. Do not forget *your friend*; tell her sometimes that you preserve for her an attachment which constitutes the felicity of her life; often repeat to her that you are happy, and be assured that for her the future will thus be peaceful, as the past has been stormy—and often sad.”

The too-devoted Josephine appeared no more upon the public arena; in silence and seclusion she suffered a few years, and died broken-hearted.

It was not this sacrifice alone that presaged Napoleon's fall; but passing by France and Russia, he had taken

a daughter of the House of Hapsburg—a tyrannical, faithless race. In this, while securing the favor of the nobility in the royal scheme, he swept away the last claim to sincerity in his conflicts for *the people* against despotism. The niece of Maria Antoinette, whose blood had scarcely faded from the guillotine, was empress of France.

Napoleon—who had overthrown the old feudal system, and revolutionized Europe prepared for the stupendous changes by the corrupt monarchies of the past—failed to redeem his pledge of regeneration and reconstruction of half a continent laid at his feet. “He married the fresh, the genial, the immortal, the glorious, the newly-born future, which all coming ages will claim, to the corrupt, and effete, and putrid corpse of the dark ages.”

And the shock he had given to his sovereignty, by the imprisonment of the Roman Pontiff, was more widely felt than was apparent. These events were followed by another blow upon the base of the imperial throne—startling to the callous and iron-hearted monarch. King Louis disregarded the rule of Napoleon, which was, to make “the first object of his care the emperor, the second, France, and the third, Holland,” and was pliant in the enforcement of the Berlin and Milan decrees, by which he grew in popularity with the people. He was rebuked by Napoleon, and hating the restraint upon his reign, suddenly abdicated his throne, and retired with disgust into private life, at Gratz in Styria. Holland was immediately annexed to the empire of France. The Peninsular war continued; the people were unsubdued, except by the force of arms; and Joseph was still the weary, powerless representative of a king. Amid these causes of irritation, which pointed ominously to the future, Napoleon’s

heart beat proudly with the fruition of cherished hope.

On the 20th of March, 1811, his wishes were crowned by the birth of a son. The birth was a difficult one, and the nerves of the medical attendant were shaken. “She is but a woman,” said the emperor, who was present, “treat her as you would a *bourgeoise* of the *Rue St. Denis*.” The accoucher at a subsequent moment withdrew Napoleon from the couch, and demanded whether, in case one life must be sacrificed, he should save the mother’s or the child’s. “The mother’s,” he answered: “it is her right!” At length the child appeared, but without any sign of life. After the lapse of some minutes a feeble cry was heard, and Napoleon entering the antechamber in which the high functionaries of the state were assembled, announced the event in these words: “It is a king of Rome!”

The booming of cannon announced in the capital the advent of an heir to the crown of Napoleon; and the tidings spread over the realm, accompanied with all the demonstrations of enthusiasm which had before attended the birth of a dauphin. The Bourbons and their friends, heard in the shouts of joy, the knell of their hopes. Murat had anticipated an independent sovereignty for his family in Naples; the King of Prussia was chafing against the humbling conditions of peace, ready to avenge the rifled tomb of Frederic, even upon the husband of an Austrian princess; and Russia was preparing again for war. When Alexander heard of the marriage with Maria Louisa, he remarked, “Then the next thing will be to drive us back into our forests.” The “Continental System,” as the blockade-policy was called, increased the antagonism of Russia, which, jealousy of Napoleon’s greatness, and his refusal to give desired pledges favoring the plans of extending power,

had nourished. And the union with the House of Austria was significant of resources for any service his absolute will might require. Sweden at this period, to please the emperor, and enthrone a man she believed fit to be a king, placed Bernadotte on the throne. But with the appearance of fidelity to the monarch who raised him from obscurity to fame, he soon betrayed Napoleon, and became his open enemy.

Thus environed with difficulties, the Emperor of France once more opened negotiations with England for peace. He desired it, doubtless; he would avoid the hazard attending another general conflict, and he preferred to develop the elements of prosperity and glory in France. The decided, stern refusal of England to recognize Joseph King of Spain, closed the correspondence, and sounded afresh the tocsin of war. Russia was plied with English influence, and Alexander could not long resist the pressure from abroad and his nobles at home, added to his own embarrassed schemes of empire.

In April, 1812, Russia declared war. In doing so, the treaty of Tilsit was broken with faithless contempt of the most sacred obligations, and the signal of another combined effort to crush Napoleon was thrown out upon the vast horizon of the empire of the north.

The French emperor had issued conscriptions; and from Switzerland, Italy, Bavaria, and the vine-clad hills of France, the battalions came pouring into the ranks of the grand army, till half a million of men were ready to march into the fearful wastes of Russia, to furnish the world a tragedy of war, never before or since recorded in history.

The prospective campaign was too daring and perilous not to awaken fears in heroic minds. Talleyrand opposed it; Fouché drew up a memorial against it,

and called the emperor's attention to the important crisis. Napoleon replied, "It is no crisis at all, but a mere war of politics. Spain falls whenever I have destroyed the English influence at St. Petersburg. Did not you yourself once tell me that the word *impossible* is not French?" It deserves to be mentioned that neither this statesman nor any of his compeers, ever even alluded to the injustice of making war on Russia for the mere gratification of ambition. Their arguments were all drawn from the extent of Alexander's resources—his four hundred thousand regulars, and his fifty thousand Cossacks, already known to be in arms, and the enormous population on which he had the means of drawing for recruits; the enthusiastic national feeling of the Muscovites; the distance of their country; the severity of their climate; the opportunity which such a war would afford to England of urging her successes in Spain; and the chance of Germany rising in insurrection in case of any reverses!

Cardinal Fesch, who grieved at the arrest of the Pope, looked with alarm on this expedition, as an insane measure to secure the vengeance of Heaven. He entreated Napoleon not "to provoke at once the wrath of man and the fury of the elements." The emperor drew the cardinal to the window, and pointing upward, exclaimed "Do you see yonder star?" "No, sire," replied the cardinal. "But I see it," answered Napoleon; and abruptly dismissed him.

May 9th, Bonaparte left Paris with the empress, and with triumphal splendor, followed by the shouts of the people, reached Dresden, the capital of Saxony.

Here he gathered about him the kings of Prussia, Naples, Wirtemberg, and Westphalia; and he sat in the palace of another, more like the monarch among courtiers, than the royal general on his way to fresh

and wasting conflicts with the lauded sovereign of the earth's proudest realms. The population of the surrounding country thronged the streets, and surged like waves of the sea, against the palace walls, to see the man before whose greatness the rulers of the world were dwarfed to common men. Napoleon was confident of success; the word *destiny* rang in the chambers of thought like a trumpet-call to the conquest of Europe.

May 28th, leaving Dresden, and parting with Maria Louisa at Prague, he pressed on to Dantzic, which was governed by General Rapp, a favorite with Napoleon. This officer, Murat, and Berthier, confessed to the emperor their reluctance to engage in the perilous uncertainty of the Russian campaign.

June 22d Napoleon issued the following bulletin:

"Soldiers! Russia is dragged on by her fate: her destiny must be accomplished. Let us march: let us cross the Niemen: let us carry war into her territories. Our second campaign of Poland will be as glorious as our first: but our second peace shall carry with it its own guaranty: it shall put an end forever to that haughty influence which Russia has exercised for fifty years on the affairs of Europe." The address, in which the czar announced the terminations of his negotiations, invoked the aid of Almighty Providence as "the witness and the defender of the true cause;" and concluded in these words—"Soldiers, you fight for your religion, your liberty, and your native land. Your emperor is among you, and God is the enemy of the aggressor."

From Dantzic, on the 11th of June, Napoleon advanced to Königsberg, where immense stores were collected for the long march into Russian forests, and over desert wastes. The divisions of the grand army

commanded by Davoust, Oudinot, Ney, Eugene, Poinatowski, St. Cyr, Regnier, Jerome, Victor, Macdonald, Augereau, Murat, and Schwartzberg. Marshals Mortier, Lefebvre, and Bessières, led the imperial guard. This splendid cavalcade, which Napoleon reviewed on the battle-plain of Friedland, with all the equipments of siege and difficult marches, reached, the last of June, the banks of the rushing Niemen, beneath the dark shadow of the silent wilderness.

It was on the 24th, that the host began to cross, in three great caravans at as many different points, the bridges they had built; the river reflecting the glittering weapons and nodding plumes, as for two days and nights they moved forward under the eye of Napoleon. While reconnoitering the banks at Kowno, his horse stumbled and fell. "A bad omen—a Roman would return," he exclaimed.

Over the plains of Lithuania, the battalions advanced without opposition from the enemy, towards Wilna, the capital of Russian Poland; it was evacuated at their approach. Here Napoleon rested on the 28th of June; but the magazines which he anticipated had been consumed—a prelude to the greater conflagration, whose flames would prove the funeral-torch of desolation wherever they retired; every village was burned ere they quitted it; the enthusiastic peasantry withdrew with the army, and swelled its ranks."

The brave Poles rallied around the emperor, and petitioned him to restore to them their nationality, furnishing as an expression of confidence and hope, eighty-five thousand troops to join the desperate campaign against their gigantic and cruel foe. But Napoleon's refusal to meet the demand of Russia, "that the kingdom of Poland should never be established, and that her name be effaced forever from every public

and official act," was no mean cause of hostilities, while Austria and Prussia were too deeply involved in the piratical possession, to make the intervention desirable. He accepted the heroic men, yet struck no blow for Polish freedom. There is an apology in the complication of affairs, and still is it true, that the emperor never periled an iota of power, or swerved from his single object of attaining a higher summit of glory, by the rescue or protection of a dependent nation. It was necessity or ambitious choice that guided his interposition whenever given to the kingdoms and colonies for which despots contended.

He remained three weeks at Wilna, detained by the slowness of the arrival of the impromptitude of his commissariat; a pause Alexander with energy improved. A million of soldiers inured to the rigors of a polar winter, swarmed to the standard of the autocrat. Moscow offered eighty thousand men; the Grand Duchess of Russia, whose rival was Maria Louisa, equipped a regiment on her own estate; and the Cossack-chief Platoff bid for Napoleon's life, with the premium of his only daughter, and a dower of 200,000 rubles.

"The Russian plan of defense was already ascertained, and alarming. The country was laid utterly desolate wherever they retired; every village was burned ere they quitted it; the enthusiastic peasantry withdrew with the army, and swelled its ranks."

With these scenes of conflagration hourly occurring, and bloody battles between, the French legions hastened toward Moscow.

"On the 5th of September, Napoleon came in sight of the position of Kutusoff, and succeeded in carrying a redoubt in front of it. All the 6th the two armies lay in presence of each other, preparing for the contest. The Russians were posted on an elevated plain;

having a wood on their right flank, their left on one of the villages, and a deep ravine, the bed of a small stream, in their front. Extensive field-works covered every more accessible point of this naturally very strong ground; and in the center of the whole line, a gentle eminence was crowned by an enormous battery, serving as a species of citadel. The Russian army were one hundred and twenty thousand in number; nor had Napoleon a greater force in readiness for his attack. In artillery also the armies were equal. It is supposed that each had five hundred guns in the field.

"To his sanguinary troops Napoleon said, 'Soldiers! here is the battle you have longed for; it is necessary, for it brings us plenty—good winter quarters, and a safe return to our country. Behave yourselves so that posterity may say of each of you, He was in that great conflict beneath the walls of Moscow.'"

At four o'clock in the morning of the 7th, the French advanced under cover of a thick fog, and assaulted at once the center, the right, and the left of the position. Such was the impetuosity of the charge that they drove the Russians from their redoubts; but this was but for a moment. They rallied under the very line of their enemy's fire, and instantly readvanced. Peasants who, till that hour, had never seen war, and still wore their rustic dress, distinguished only by the cross sewed on it in front, threw themselves into the thickest of the combat. As they fell, others rushed on and filled their places. Some idea may be formed of the obstinacy of the contest from the fact, that of one division of the Russians which mustered thirty thousand in the morning, only eight thousand survived. These men had fought in close order and unshaken, under the fire of eighty pieces of artillery. The result of this terrible day was, that Bonaparte withdrew his troops and aban-