

formed part of the corps to which I was attached, was eight thousand strong when we left Moscow ; at Wilna it scarcely numbered four hundred. All the other corps are reduced in the same proportion ; and as the flight did not end at the Niemen, I am persuaded that not twenty thousand men reached the Vistula. It was believed in the army that a great many soldiers were on in front, who would rally when it was possible to suspend the retreat. I convinced myself of the contrary ; at five leagues from headquarters I met no more stragglers, and I was then aware of the extent of the calamity.

“ A single fact may give your majesty an idea of the state of things. Since crossing the Niemen a corps of eight hundred Neapolitans, the only corps which has preserved any sort of order, formed the rear-guard of a French army the strength of which once amounted to three hundred thousand men. It is impossible to say how contagious was the disorder : the corps of the Dukes of Belluno and Reggio amounted together to thirty thousand men when they crossed the Beresina ; two days afterward they had melted away like the rest of the army. Sending reinforcements only increased the losses, and at last we became aware that fresh troops must not be allowed to come in contact with a disorderly multitude which could no longer be called an army. The King of Naples declared that, in delegating the command to him, the emperor exacted the greatest possible proof of his devotion. Both the moral and physical strength of the Prince of Neufchatel were completely exhausted. If your majesty were now to ask me when the retreat is to end, I can say only that it depends on the enemy. I do not think Prussia will make much effort to defend her territory. M. de Narbonne, whom I saw at Berlin, and who was the bearer

of letters from the emperor to the King of Prussia, told me that both the king and his prime minister were favorably disposed, but that he was aware that the feeling of the nation was different. Already several brawls had taken place between the citizens of Berlin and the soldiers of the French garrison ; and when I passed through Prussia, I had opportunities of convincing myself that no trust could be placed in our recent ally.

“ It seems also that in the Austrian army the officers declaim openly against the war.

“ Sad as this picture is, I believe it to be painted without exaggeration, and that my observations have been made with impartiality. My estimate of the extent of the evil is the same now as it was when I was nearer to the scene of action.”

Napoleon marched with his wasting battalions by a new route toward Smolensk. The Cossacks made fearful havoc with the scattered companies, cutting them down, plundering, and then on their fleet horses retiring to their forest-lair. When he passed the Souja, the emperor came near falling into their hands ; but in their lust for spoil, they overlooked the defiant, weary leader in this terrible march of death. October 23d, he rested at Borouk, sixty miles from Moscow. A few miles farther on lay Eugene's force of eighteen thousand troops. Before dawn of the next day the Russians fell upon him, and after a bloody struggle were compelled to leave the field. Napoleon embraced Eugene, and exclaimed, “ This is the most glorious of your feats of arms.”

Learning here that one hundred and thirty thousand Russians, strongly intrenched, crossed his path, he called a council of war. He decided, with bitter disappointment, to abandon the attempt to press through the defiles of Kalouga, and retire to the “ war-scathed

road" in which he came so proudly to the fatal plains of the north. The Russian army, ignorant of the movement, and alarmed by the victory of Eugene, also began a retreat; the two armies thus flying from each other, but neither aware of the advantage given. For seven hundred and fifty miles, Napoleon had but two points at which repose and supplies could be obtained. Upon this awful march—this "Iliad of woes"—the great captain, and peerless monarch, sadly, despondingly entered.

It was on the 26th, that the march commenced, and on the 28th the army passed over the field of Borodino. The unburied, decaying dead, half-eaten by the wolves, made the living soldier pass with averted face to his own fate—mortal agony on the spear-point of the Cossack, or the lethargy which has no waking. Three hundred miles were traversed in ten days; and yet onward, between the Russian columns watching their progress—followed by the dashing, savage hordes of Platoff—and the hunger-maddened wolves, the struggling columns moved. With November came the settled gloom and unalleviated cold of a Russian winter. Storms howled around the thinning ranks of the grand cavalcade, and the angry sky grew dark above them. They fell in battalions to rise no more till the resurrection morning. The brave, indomitable, chivalrous Ney, protected this retreat of the imperial army; and his marvelous skill, his endurance and courage, elevated his rank in the admiration of the world, nearer his commander, than that of any other man in the constellation of noble marshals who waited on Napoleon.

November 9th, the emperor was before Smolensk. Instead of the promised and expected supplies for his soldiers, there was nothing but brandy—the direst foe

of the hungry and benumbed soldiers. They drank and died in groups along the icy streets. Since the departure from Moscow, eighty thousand men had fallen, and no more than forty thousand could now enter the battle-field, were the opposing armies to meet.

A messenger had reached Napoleon with intelligence which increased his fears, and his desire to be in the capital of France. Mallet, an officer, forged a report of the emperor's death, and gathered to his standard, in the excitement which followed, a part of the national guard. He was arrested and shot. But the conspiracy revealed to Napoleon the frail tenure of his regal authority, and how little a son might have to do with the continuance of his dynasty.

Five days were passed in Smolensk, receiving despatches, and preparing for the final effort to reach the boundaries of friendly territory.

Murat, Eugene, Davoust, and Ney commanded the divisions of an army, reduced to less than one tenth of its original numbers. Kutusoff with more than double the force, hung along his track, in a parallel line of march.

At length he advanced and crossed the path of his enemy. A battle followed, and through wasting carnage the first division cut its way. Eugene's battalions followed, and met the same wall of bristling bayonets and batteries. But the columns moved on, and were mowed down in ranks, till only a remnant escaped. This band had no other hope, but to leave their camp-fires burning, and creep around the impregnable position. A Russian sentinel saw a company of them and gave the challenge; but a Pole answered in the national dialect, and all was silent. The deception saved the brave four thousand under Beauharnais. Davoust and Mortier, were at Krasnoi, holding the

enemy back, if possible, till Ney could join them. This splendid officer who led the rear-guard, found at Smolensk the heaps of the dead, assuring him of accumulating disasters upon the advanced divisions of the army. The opposition to his progress was considerable, till he reached the ravine of Sormina, over which hung a curtain of heavy mist, and obscured the masses of Russian troops, and the frowning batteries which lay beyond. He was in the resistless grasp of the foe.

A Russian officer summoned Ney to surrender. "A marshal of France never surrenders," was the heroic answer; and instantly the artillery, distant only two hundred and fifty yards, poured its storm of grape shot into his ranks. Ney plunged into the ravine, crossed the stream, and charged the astonished legions at the cannon's mouth. He was beaten back by the merciless fire, and still held his original position under the very shadow of the grim batteries through which not a man could pass alive. Napoleon, meanwhile, was deeply anxious for the fate of his favorite marshal. He expressed the intensest interest, and waited in suspense to catch some tidings of his safety or death. The night after the combat, Ney deserted his camp at midnight, and retraced his steps, till he came to a small stream, which, he told his men, must enter into the Dnieper. On through the untraveled, howling wilderness—through snow, and across icy plains—the intrepid marshal led his brave band. He was not mistaken in his plan; he came upon the great river which he sought, and found a surface of ice, which swayed and cracked beneath his feet. The soldiers in single file passed over; but the wagons laden with the wounded and the ordnance, crushed the frail bridge, and went down into the cold waters, sending upward

to the gloomy heavens, a shriek of wild and bitter agony. The Cossacks were also upon them. Ney sent to Napoleon at Orcha for assistance. Upon hearing the intelligence, the emperor sprang toward the messenger, and exclaimed: "Is that really true? Are you sure of it? I have two hundred millions of gold in my vaults at the Tuilleries; I would give them all to save Marshal Ney." Eugene went to the rescue, and in a few hours, the remnants of the grand divisions of the imperial army, reduced since leaving Smolensk from forty thousand to twelve thousand men, met with mournful joy at Orcha. There were but one hundred and fifty of the cavalry, and to remedy the deficiency, five hundred officers still possessing horses were formed "into a sacred band," to guard the person of Napoleon. The Dnieper was crossed, but tidings of additional disaster reached him. Minsk had fallen; another oasis in the desert was wiped out by the legions of Russia. A new line of march into Poland, was chosen, north of the ruined town, and haste was demanded, to escape the successful Witgenstein on the right flank, and Tchichagoff on his left. The Beresina was to be the next cold and rushing stream, whose passage would be disputed by the unwasted columns of Alexander. The point of transit selected by Napoleon was Borizoff, when he heard that Dambrowski who commanded there had been defeated by Witgenstein, and abandoned the position. He then advanced farther up, to Studzianska.

"His twelve thousand men, brave and determined, but no longer preserving in their dress, nor unless when the trumpet blew, in their demeanor, a soldier-like appearance, were winding their way amid these dark woods, when suddenly the air around them was filled with

sounds which could only proceed from the march of some far greater host. They were preparing for the worst, when they found themselves in presence of the advanced guard of the united army of Victor and Oudinot, who had indeed been defeated by Witgenstein, but still mustered fifty thousand men, completely equipped, and hardly shaken in discipline. With what feelings must these troops have surveyed the miserable, half-starved, and half-clad remains of that "grand army," their own detachment from whose banners had, some few short months before, filled every bosom among them with regret!"

Oudinot had been left at Smolensk, and upon the evacuation of Moscow, was ordered to move forward to secure the retreat. Victor was severely wounded at Polotsk, and compelled to retire to Wilna. These brave men parted with grief from the confident host of invasion; and now with deeper sorrow, welcomed the ragged, famishing, freezing, and bleeding remains of that unrivaled army, a few miles from Borizoff, which the marshals had meanwhile retaken. With this augmented force, the emperor moved toward the Beresina. The river was three hundred yards wide, six feet in depth, and full of floating ice. Napoleon, with artful maneuvers, deceived his enemy, and the Russian commander withdrew from Studzianska to a position eighteen miles below. When it was shown to the emperor, he exclaimed, "Then I have outwitted the general?" Before the Russians discovered the mistake, two bridges were thrown across the stream, and Oudinot had passed over. When Napoleon gained the opposite shore, his words of triumph were, "My star still reigns!" November 27th the conflict opened. Into the crowded mass of soldiers, the women and wounded, the Russians poured their iron hail of death.

One of the bridges broke down in the midst of the carnage, beneath the weight of artillery and troops, and plunged the shrieking multitude into the flood. A survivor of the campaign said, afterward, "the scream that rose, did not leave my ears for weeks; it was heard clear and loud over the hurrahs of Cossacks, and all the roar of artillery." Victor defended the bridge until evening, while the columns trampling on the dead and dying, advanced in the cannonade of the Russian batteries; he then followed, leaving the wounded and straggling portions of the army, on the enemy's bank. He fired the bridge and left them to their fate, as the stern necessity of war. When spring thawed the Beresina, twelve thousand bodies were drifted from its bed.

December 3d the struggling companies arrived at Molodaczno. Here they met supplies despatched from Wilna, to which town were sent immediately, under escort, the wounded and whatever encumbered the army. Napoleon called a council of war, and announced the decision to his officers of returning without delay to Paris.

The troops were near the soil of Poland, and sure of an abundance to feed and clothe them. The design was approved, and the emperor on the 5th, leaving the chief command to Murat, bade the garrison and relics of the "grand army," drawn up before Wilna, adieu, and set off at midnight with a few attendants in three sledges, for the capital of France. Near Warsaw he just escaped falling into the hands of a company of Russians; and on the 10th entered that city. His ambassador there, Abbe de Pradt, whose mission was a failure, which occasioned his removal, congratulated the emperor upon his deliverance from so great dangers. "Dangers," cried Napoleon, "there were none—I have beat the Russians in every battle—I live but

in dangers—it is for kings of Cockaigne to sit at home at ease. My army is in a superb condition still—it will be recruited at leisure at Wilna, and I go to bring up three hundred thousand men more from France.”

On the 14th he was at Dresden, and visited by the king of Saxony, who renewed his pledge of fidelity.

Four days later, he entered the Tuilleries after Maria Louisa had retired to sleep. A cry of alarm from the startled inmates roused the empress, and in another moment she embraced, with unfeigned affection, the royal fugitive. The next morning he held a levee, and freely declared the disastrous ravages of fire and frost among his annihilated army. The eighty thousand soldiers and stragglers left at Wilna continued to waste away before the increasing cold. Crossing the bridge at Kowno with only thirty thousand—the “Old Guard” was reduced to three hundred men—Marshal Ney had fought his way on, his path lined and paved with his slaughtered and frozen troops, and was the last to pass the bridge, with thirty heroes by his side. Calmly walking back toward the enemy’s shore, he fired the last shot, and threw his gun into the river. When he met General Dumas on the German side, in the house of a friend, he answered to the question, “Who are you?” “I am the rear-guard of the grand army—Marshal Ney. I have fired the last musket shot on the bridge of Kowno, I have thrown into the Niemen the last of our arms, and I have walked hither, as you see me, across the forest.” The annals of war can present no more sublime defiance of an unconquered will, and quenchless ardor of devotion to his king and country.

CHAPTER VIII.

Napoleon’s reception after the defeat in Russia—His character.—The new coalition—Battle of Lutzen.—Entrance into Dresden.—Battle of Bautzen.—Negotiations.—Metternich.—The plan of campaign.—Siege of Dresden.—Disasters.—Napoleon’s desperate courage.—Battle of Leipsic.—Murat abandons the Emperor’s cause.—Treachery of the Allies.—The Senate of France falter in their support.—Napoleon’s rebuke.—Correspondence with Joseph.—Napoleon at the Tuilleries.—He enters on the final struggle.—Battle of Brienne.—Letters.—Want of arms.—Letters.—The progress of the Allies.—Napoleon’s expedition on the Marne.—His victories.—Letters from Joseph on the condition of Paris.—Negotiations for Peace.—Napoleon’s account of the crisis in his affairs.—His policy in his extremity.—Battle of Leon.—Rheims.—Letters to Joseph.—The last struggle.—The Allies advance toward Paris.—The flight of the Court.—The capitulation.

THE twenty-ninth bulletin of Napoleon had prepared the popular mind to welcome the emperor, whose eloquent words assured his subjects that the resistless elements alone had snatched victory from the grand army. Although nearly every family of the empire was in mourning, his magical name and presence restored the confidence, and renewed the devotion of the people. The senate, officials, and public bodies, all pressed up to the throne, with expressions of homage and applause. Enlistments were ordered, and the regiments of fresh troops gathered to his standard by thousands. The arsenals were alive with preparation, and in each habitation, the farewell to some manly inmate was spoken. Within a few weeks, Napoleon was at the head of three hundred and fifty thousand soldiers, fresh from the bosom of a loyal, gallant nation. The grandeur of his genius, was seen and felt at home and abroad, in the magnificent expenditures of money