CHAPTER XXII.

THE PRISONER AND THE EXILE.

NEVER was the adage respecting one going down hill more strikingly verified than in the case of the emperor in his hours of misfortune. Even his buried mother Hortense and the Empress Eugénie had to take their share of the merciless vituperation. They were held up to the scorn of the world as women whose very touch was pollution. It was feared by the foes of the empire that popular suffrage might re-establish the imperial throne. Resort was therefore had to all the poisoned weapons of calumny to prevent this result. Accusations were fabricated, and documents, letters, and private papers, forged to prove that the Palace of the Tuileries, where for twenty years the most pure and illustrious of the gentlemen and ladies of England and America had found hospitable welcome, had been but a warehouse of infamy, seething with pollutions scarcely equalled by those of Sodom and Gomorrah. Must it be forever so that political antagonism shall extinguish every sentiment of magnanimity and honor?

Probably never before in the history of the world was a man assailed so fiercely and unscrupulously as was

the Emperor of the French in his hours of misfortune. A writer in "The London Sunday Times" of Aug. 14 raised a feeble voice of remonstrance.

"I feel constrained," he wrote, "to lift up my voice in humble but earnest protest against the splenetic, malevolent, and contemptuous tone adopted by too many of your contemporaries in their allusions to the present monarch of the great French nation.

"Even had the emperor no claim whatever on the esteem and courtesy of Englishmen, there would still be something exceedingly repulsive and ignoble in the zest with which the writers referred to have seized upon the moment of his supreme anxiety to heap upon him abuse which could only be merited by a monster in whom the knave and the fool were equally dominant.

"The culmination of adversity should at least impose some restraint upon scorn and resentment, even though it fail to awaken compassion and sympathy. The Emperor of the French may have been at fault in permitting his ministers to hurry him into a causeless and awful war. It is not of legitimate comment and criticism that I now venture to complain. I protest against violent, scornful, unjust, and vulgar abuse; against irritating sneers and vindictive insolence; against lying vituperation and swaggering impertinence. Let it not be said that I exaggerate."

After quoting sundry of these assaults from "The Daily News," "The Pall-Mall Gazette," and "The London Times," which abundantly sustained his statement, he continues: —

"Now, of whom is all this written? Of a man, who, during the whole period of his ascendency, has been the self-sacrificing friend and the faithful ally of this coun-

try. For years after he assumed the chief direction of affairs in France, he was treated every day and every week, by nearly the whole English press, to foul and scornful reprobation; yet, under provocations which would have goaded almost anybody else to madness, he sustained those onslaughts with marvellous patience. He never once resented them.

"In great enterprises he has co-operated with us, maintaining a candor, a courtesy, a consideration, and delicacy of respect, which all who have had directly to deal with him have gratefully acknowledged. In evil report and in good report, he has been fast and frank in his friendship with England. We owe vast expansions of our trade to his sagacity in framing and instituting the commercial treaty.

"Say what we will, under his auspices the material interests of France have undergone a marvellous development. The prosperity has been accompanied by some of the higher forms of popular progress. Have we any reasons for hunting down a monarch who never did us harm, and who has established the most venerable claims on our respect and gratitude?"

On the 18th of October, an English gentleman had an interview with the emperor at Wilhelmshöhe. In a communication he made to "The London Telegraph," he writes, —

"Napoleon III. was seated before a desk encumbered with documents, books, and newspapers. The apartment he uses as a study is a small square room not unlike the cabinet he used at the Tuileries. The emperor looked in every respect as well as when I last saw him at St. Cloud in July last. I reminded him that he had then spoken to me of the Hohenzollern incident, which he had regarded as *finished*.

"'Yes,' said the emperor with a sigh. '*L'homme propose, mais Dieu dispose*. I had no wish to make war; but fatality willed that it should be so. Public opinion was aroused in its favor; and I was obliged to acquiesce in the popular wish.'

"The emperor confidently relies upon the verdict of history to exonerate him from all the charges heaped upon his head. He alluded, but without bitterness, to the numberless calumnies of which he is the object in many parts of France. He spoke in despondent terms of the present distracted condition of France, — a prey to a foreign foe without, and anarchy within.

"When I ventured to ask him if the time would not soon come when he would be authorized to make some movement by his own initiative to retrieve his fortunes, he at once replied, that the sole aim of France must now be to drive out the invader of her soil; and he would never, by word or deed, throw any obstacles in the way of accomplishing that task."[1]

On the 9th of November, a correspondent of "The New-York Herald" was favored with an interview with the emperor at the Castle of Wilhelmshöhe. He found his Majesty perfectly free in his daily movements, and treated with profound respect. Traversing a number of stately halls and apartments, he was presented to the emperor in a room so small, that a writing-desk before the fire took up nearly the whole floor.

In the course of the conversation, the emperor is reported to have expressed the following sentiments: —

"All must admit that the press is a powerful institution. In France it has worked much good, and also

[1] London Telegraph, October, 1870

much injury. When I consented to its being freed entirely from censorship, it was seized by demagogues and unscrupulous politicians, who openly preached disobedience to the laws; and they were but too successful in perverting the minds of the people.

"The same intelligence does not prevail in France that is found in the United States. The seditious arguments advanced by the press, when in the hands of pretended reformers, easily inflamed the untutored minds of the people.

"I suppose that Americans would naturally sympathize with republican institutions; but all the conditions requisite to a true republican form of government are absolutely wanting in France. Those who boldly grasped the reins of power have already discovered their utter inability to establish such a government. That for which they blamed me most, they have been compelled to do themselves, and in a form still more obnoxious.

"The restraint imposed upon the press, for instance, was the constant theme of the most violent attacks upon my government. But while I made but moderate use of this law, while fines and punishments were rare, and were preceded by a mild system of *avertissements*, they have suppressed a number of journals because they did not chime in with their fantastic ideas of republican sentiments.

"The republic of America and the republic of France are as different as white is from black. Your country submits to law. Public sentiment and public spirit, based upon general intelligence and morality, dictate the control of society. In New York and Boston, the theatres are allowed to perform such plays as they deem

fit. Suppose they should treat the public to impure and offensive pieces: the press would denounce them; nobody would go to see them; they would be condemned by the verdict of the public.

"But, in France, the greater the departure from morality and decorum, the greater will be the crowd flocking to delight in it. It is no easy work to curb such an extravagant and depraved spirit in a country so often unhappily shaken by revolution. It requires the utmost energy to build up any thing, — any form of state government.

"I know the American people to be a frank-hearted, generous nation; and I cannot believe they approve of the slanderous accusations now preferred against me. Have you read the vile statement, published in the 'Indépendance Belge' and in other journals, that I had appropriated the public funds, and conjured up war to conceal such illegal transactions? I wish to state emphatically that such a breach of trust under my government in France is an utter impossibility. Not a single franc is expended without severe checks on the part of the administration. This fact is well known to every intelligent person in France. I could hardly attempt to contradict all these vile calumnies, though I have denied a few of them."

In reference to the war the emperor remarked, "We deceived ourselves as to the strength of our own army as well as that of the Prussians. I have often cautioned my ministers against erroneous statements. It was probably no fault of their hearts, but of their heads, that they would not listen to me when I told them that we could not compete with Prussia's military establishment; that our effective strength as compared to hers

was insufficient. This was the deception, the fault of which must be shared more or less by all of us, which has led to the most disastrous results. We were to have ready for service, at a moment's notice, two hundred thousand reserves. When they were needed, however, not more than one-half the number was at hand. Thus the Prussians got 'ahead' of us, as you would say. Notwithstanding all this, the bravery of our troops obliged them to use double numbers of men to gain easy victories.

"France needs peace; but the conditions imposed by Count Bismarck are too exacting. What government in France could accept them, and at the same time maintain itself against the outraged people? France cannot endure so deep a humiliation."

"Will your Majesty," the correspondent inquired, "have the goodness to explain why the provisional government so obstinately refuses to hold an election for representatives in the constituent assembly?"

"In my opinion," the emperor replied, "it is because it is afraid of the reds."

"May they not," it was asked, "have as much reason to apprehend that a large number of Bonapartists may be returned?"

"I do not think so," said the emperor. "The discordant elements of socialism, communism, and anarchy, have spread terror throughout the country, and gotten the upper hand; and it is very difficult to contend with such Utopian and seductive influences."

In reference to the restoration of the empire, and the recall of the emperor by the popular voice, Napoleon said, —

"When I consider the uncertainty lurking on the road

to such an aim, when I consider the vast impediments to be removed, I really feel but little ambition. I would rather be independent. I would rather be as I now am, — a prisoner, — and never step again on French soil."

"But with regard to your Majesty's interest as a father," it was said, "you must be naturally desirous of bequeathing your throne to your promising son, and thus upholding the dynasty."

"No," the emperor replied with much manifest emotion: "not even for him could I wish it. I love him too much to desire for him chances of such dread uncertainty. If these cannot be avoided, he would be far happier in private life, without the overwhelming responsibilities attaching to such a station, and that, too, in France, which can never forget a humiliation."

Some journals have expressed doubts respecting the authenticity of the above narrative; but the sentiments expressed are in manifest accord with every report which has come from the prisoner of Wilhelmshöhe.

The testimony in reference to the sentiments and conduct of the Empress Eugénie, from all those who were favored with an interview, is uniformly the same. She had found a retreat at Chiselhurst, in the county of Kent, England, a small, rambling village, about half an hour's ride, on the railway, from Charing Cross. She, with her suite, occupied Camden House, a three-story mansion of red and yellow brick, with a park and pretty ornamental grounds. A lady, writing from London to "The New-York World" under date of Oct. 18, 1870, gives the following account of an interview: —

"I have heard much of the beauty and grace of the

empress; but I was not prepared to see a person of such exquisite loveliness.

"While I do not feel at liberty to repeat the words which the empress uttered, either to myself or to others in my hearing, I may express the conviction with which I left her presence. She loves France, and is anxious for its welfare, — more anxious for that than for the restoration of the empire and perpetuity of the Napoleonic dynasty. She has nothing to do with the intrigues that are going on here, or in Jersey, or at Mons, or at Wilhelmshöhe. She sees that the salvation of France depends upon the maintenance of the provisional government, now established there, until the enemy has been driven from its borders; and it is for this that she hopes, for this she works, and for this she prays daily, if not hourly; being oftener on her knees than on her feet, asking the intercession of our Blessed Lady for the land which is so rich in faith, as well as so sadly stained with unbelief.

"That the great majority of the French people still look upon her husband as their lawful ruler, chosen by them in the first place, and confirmed in his authority by their repeated votes, she believes: that they will ask him to return to them, or that, at least, they will demand the restoration of his dynasty, she considers probable. But that is not the question now. The question now is, 'How to save France from being conquered and crushed by Germany;' and he is her friend who aids in that work, be he republican or imperialist.

"When peace is restored, and the country is once more free to choose its form of government, it will be time then to decide whether it will elect to recall a ruler under whom a score of years of uninterrupted

prosperity and peace were enjoyed, or to continue in power a party who drove that ruler into a war for which he was wholly unprepared, and which he was wholly unwilling to undertake. It was liberal France that made the war unavoidable; it was imperial France that desired peace, and dreaded war: but it remains for the future to show whether France is still, at heart, imperialistic, or republican. The empire was established by the votes of the people, and confirmed by their voices over and over again. The people have not expressed any wish for the substitution of a republic for the empire: should they do so, the empress will not be found plotting against them."

Gen. Dix, in his address to the Americans in Paris upon his retirement from his embassy to the court of the Tuileries, paid the following just and beautiful tribute to the character of Eugénie: —

"Of her who is the sharer of the emperor's honors, and the companion of his toils; who in the hospital, at the altar, or on the throne, is alike exemplary in the discharge of her varied duties, whether incident to her position, or voluntarily taken upon herself, — it is difficult for me to speak without rising above the level of the common language of eulogium. But I am standing here to-day as a citizen of the United States, without official relations to my own government or any other. I have taken my leave of the imperial family; and I know of no reason why I may not freely speak what I honestly think, especially as I know I can say nothing which will not find a cordial response in your breasts.

"As, in the history of the ruder sex, great luminaries have from time to time risen high above the horizon, to break, and at the same time to illustrate, the monot-

ony of the general movement; so, in the annals of her sex, brilliant lights have at intervals shone forth, and shed their lustre upon the stately march of regal pomp and power.

"And such is she of whom I am speaking. When I have seen her taking part in the most imposing, as I think, of all imperial pageants, — the opening of the Legislative Chambers, — standing amidst the assembled magistracy of Paris, surrounded by the representatives of the talent, the genius, the learning, the literature, and the piety of this great empire, or amidst the resplendent scenes of the palace, moving about with a gracefulness all her own, and with a simplicity of manner which has a double charm when allied to exalted rank and station, I confess that I have more than once whispered to myself, and I believe not always inaudibly, that beautiful verse of the graceful and courtly Claudian, the last of the Roman poets, —

'Divino servitu gressu claruit;'

or, rendered in our own plain English, 'The very path she treads is radiant with her unrivalled step.'"

CHAPTER XXIII.

WAR AND ITS WOES.

THE capture of the army at Sedan, with the emperor, was an irreparable disaster to France. There was no longer any force in the field to resist the invaders; there was no longer any government which France would recognize. It was no longer possible for neighboring dynasties, despising democracy, to enter into alliance to aid France, since such aid would strengthen that democracy which the dynasties feared far more, even, than they feared Germanic supremacy in Europe. Victorious Prussia was also deeply embarrassed. She had overthrown the republican empire, with its respect for monarchical forms, only to introduce the genuine democracy of Favre and Hugo and Rochefort, which prided itself in trampling all monarchical forms under its feet. Thus was Prussia inspired with a new incentive to reject all terms of peace but those which would re-establish monarchy in some of its forms in France, or which would so degrade and weaken the nation, that Europe would have nothing to fear from a dishonored and powerless democracy.

Never before in the history of the world was there so sudden and awful a collapse of a great nation.