

KINGS OF THE BATTLE-FIELD.

CHAPTER I.

NAPOLEON BONAPARTE.

Birthplace and Ancestry—Military Education—Commissioned at Sixteen—Promoted—Marriage—Campaign in 1796—Battling with Italy—Entering Milan—At the Bridge of Arcola—"Are you the Victors of Lodi?"—Peace in 1797—In Egypt—Fighting Mamelukes and the English—Discomfited—Return to France—First Consul—Overtures to the English—"You may destroy France, but you can never intimidate her"—Emperor of the French—Placing the Crown on his own head—Miscellaneous Victories—Distribution of power—Drawing the sword and throwing away the scabbard—The "Jewel set in the Silver Sea"—Expedition to Moscow—Famine, Frost, Disorder—Destruction of Moscow—Dethroned—Banished to Elba—In France again—Waterloo.

IN the little town of Ajaccio, on the island of Corsica, August 15, 1769, was born Napoleon Bonaparte, just two months after the conquest of the island by the French. His ancestors were Italians. His father, Charles Bonaparte, had taken refuge in Corsica when the civil war had rent Florence, but the family kept up their intercourse with their native country, and were as much Italians as Corsicans. Letitia Ramolino, wife of Charles Bonaparte, and mother of Napoleon, was a woman of great beauty.

Young Napoleon grew up amid the turmoil and confusion incident to the struggle of the rugged islanders against their French conquerors; and as a child, witnessed the last efforts of his countrymen for independence. In 1789 he wrote:—"I was born when my country was sinking; the cries of the dying, the groans of the oppressed, and the tears of despair surrounded my cradle from my birth." The recollections of the war for independence were amply engraven on his mind, and no doubt added to the natural seriousness of his disposition, if they were not the cause of his unusual precocity.

While a mere child he had high patriotic ideas which seemed to be his own by instinct, rather than acquired from others. When an aged relative, the Archdeacon of Ajaccio, was dying, he called the children to his bedside to take leave of them. To Joseph Bonaparte he said: "You are the eldest; but Napoleon is the head of his family. Take care to remember my words." Doubtless, the little Napoleon took care to remember them, and one writer asserts that he immediately fell to beating his older brother, as if to show the truth of the archdeacon's dying words.

Charles Bonaparte having the art to ingratiate himself with the French authorities, succeeded in procuring for Napoleon admission into the military school of Brienne, where he was sent at the early age of eleven. On his arrival there he saw in one of the apartments a portrait of Choiseul, the author of the wrongs of his country, and he apostrophised the portrait with angry words, and went into a rage about their keeping at Brienne the portrait of such a man. He was a hard-working scholar, with an especial aptness for mathe-

matics. He was fond of history, and particularly that of the ancient republics. He loved the poems of Ossian, which were then dear to Europe. The gloomy pictures of heroic actions, passionate deeds, love, battle and victory were well suited to his own heroic and passionate nature. He had little in common with his companions, who were all the sons of the wealthy French nobility, while he was poor and a pensioner upon the king. When taunted by the boys, who were nearly all either young dukes or princes, with being educated at the king's expense, he went into a passion, and with sturdy pride declared that his education was at the expense of the country and not the king.

Probably this inequality in his own condition with his surroundings was the cause of the gloominess of his disposition, and led him to seek solitude rather than the society of his fellow-students, whose wealth and rank made such a marked contrast to his poverty and obscurity. At this early age he took something of the tone of the moralist, and censured the extravagance of his companions, and the lax discipline of the school which allowed the students to lead such lives as would unfit them for military duties. The rancor displayed in his proposed reforms, however, showed that he was actuated by a desire to level all inequalities of wealth and rank among the students, thereby lessening the contrast between his own situation and that of his more fortunate associates.

In 1783 he was sent from Brienne to the Military Academy at Paris upon the recommendation of his masters. Here he so distinguished himself by his acquirements as to be admitted into the society of the celebrated Abbe Raynal. At sixteen he was examined

by the great Laplace, and received his commission as second lieutenant of artillery. He was sent to the garrison at Valance, and assigned to the regiment La Fere.

Through the kindness of a lady he was introduced into society at Valance, and here, amid new surroundings, his character seemed to lose some of its gloomy austerity, and for the first time he showed the insinuating and seductive charm of conversation that he afterwards threw into his discourse whenever he chose to lay aside his blunt and imperious tone.

At Valance he probably first awakened to ambitious aspirations and designs, and there, dreaming of some day rescuing his beloved home, Corsica, from her French conquerors, and cherishing ideas of future greatness as the champion of freedom, the French Revolution found him. He adopted its principles without hesitation, for he had everything to gain, and nothing to lose by the struggle. Napoleon's personal appearance was very striking: though his stature was low, his figure was well knit, slim and active. His face was classic; features clear-cut and beautiful, with eyes deep-set and brilliant. His manners were blunt, and he never courted grace and refinement.

In 1792 he was promoted to Captain of artillery, and witnessed the horrors of the mob at the Tuileries, 20th June. The effect produced upon his mind by the unbridled passions of the populace, the massacre of the brave Swiss Guards, and the sight of the Royal family, insulted and outraged, fleeing for their lives, was to destroy his faith in the principles he had professed to believe in, and he expressed to his friend Bourrienne his regret that he could not "see all this rabble swept

away." But Napoleon saw and recognized the immense power and invincible strength of the revolution, and followed it to the end; seeing in the changes daily occurring the boundless field that was opened to him for his own advancement. While apparently subservient to the passions of others, he really turned them to his own account, and perhaps served France only because he could not devote himself to Corsica. Nearly all of the officers of the French army having emigrated, he saw the sure prospect of speedy promotion, and bound himself the more closely to the destiny of France as he saw others separating from her, in consequence of the excesses that were daily overwhelming her. "Calculating self-interest and ambition had gained ascendancy over every other quality he possessed." Opportunity alone was wanting to his genius, and it came swiftly. The Republican army were besieging Toulon, September, 1793. Paris was in the midst of the "reign of terror." Robespierre was glutting himself with blood. A motley crowd of English, Spanish and Neapolitans were trying to hold the city. The siege was conducted by Cartaux, an artist who knew nothing of fortification and defence. Napoleon arrived at the camp amidst the tumultuous confusion and disorder of preparations for the siege. He was on his way to Nice, the head-quarters of the Italian army, and stopped to see his friend and countryman, Saliceth, who introduced him to Cartaux. He was invited by that officer to visit the batteries he had just erected to cannonade the English fleet.

Napoleon could hardly restrain his contempt at seeing that they were placed at three times the carrying distance from the nearest ship. Cartaux was covered

with confusion and blamed the powder; but Napoleon's observations showed so much skill, and such knowledge of military affairs, that the commissioners, who were present, immediately put in a requisition for his services, and he was appointed to the command of the artillery, and consequently conducted the principal part of the siege. His great skill in the conduct of the siege of Toulon and subsequent operations won for him the appointment to join the army of Italy, with the rank of chief of battalion. He was already making rapid strides to greatness. A little later he was made second in command of the army, after being called to Paris to defend the Tuileries against the insurgents; and Barras resigning the command of the army of the interior, "the little Corsican officer" was appointed commander-in-chief of the same.

His position now invested him with the chief military command in Paris, but notwithstanding his prominence as a great general, he led a very modest and quiet life; seldom going into society, and studying hard all the while. It was at this time that an interesting boy, scarcely twelve years of age, one day presented himself to Napoleon, and stating that he was the son of a general in the Republican army who had been murdered by Robespierre, demanded his father's sword. Bonaparte ordered the sword to be given to him, and the boy's tears of joy as he received and kissed the sacred relic excited his interest and sympathy. His kind treatment of the boy caused his mother to visit Napoleon the following day to thank him. The beauty and grace of Josephine de Beauharnois made a lasting impression upon Napoleon. She was the daughter of a planter in St. Domingo, and after her

husband's death had been imprisoned until after the downfall of Robespierre. Madam Tallien was her warm friend, and had introduced Josephine to her husband's friends. These two beautiful women were the chief ornaments of the court which Barras, the first director, then held at Louxembourg. Napoleon offered his hand and she accepted it. This marriage strengthened his connection with the society at Louxembourg, and with Barras and Tallien, the two most powerful men in France.

Paris being now restored to quiet, the Directory had leisure to look to the army of Italy, and Bonaparte was appointed again to that command. When but three days married he left his beautiful bride and set out for Nice, stopping at Marseilles for a brief visit to his mother. Napoleon was but twenty-six when he assumed the command of the army of Italy, and entered upon the most brilliant scene of his life. During the months of glory that followed, his letters were full of regret and home-sickness, showing how reluctantly he parted from his beloved Josephine so soon after their wedding. But he was full of ambition and exulted in the fact that if his campaigns were successful, the glory would be all his own. He said, "In three months I shall be either in Milan or at Paris."

He made a new departure from the old established modes of war. He saw that his small army could effect but little against the vast and well-disciplined forces of Austria and her allies, unless he could, as it were, bewilder them by the rapidity of his motions, and the concentration of the whole pith and energy of his force against some one point. The soldiers were to give up such useless luxuries as baggage and tents, and

instead of long chains of reserves and stores, they were to find their subsistence in the countries where he should lead them. Everything must depend upon their success, and everything must be sacrificed to it.

The battle of Monte Nolti, fought on the 12th April, 1796, in which "the center of the allied army was utterly routed before either the commander-in-chief at the left, or General Colli at the right of the line had any notion that a battle was going on," was the first of Napoleon's great fields. In less than a month the Sardinian army was almost annihilated. Napoleon had taken possession of Cherasco, ten miles from Turin, and there dictated terms of peace to the King of Sardinia. The two great fortresses, Corri and Tortona, "the keys of the Alps," were in his possession, and indeed every place of consequence in the King of Sardinia's dominions except Turin.

On the 10th of May occurred "the terrible passage of the bridge of Lodi," as Napoleon himself afterwards called it. In that fearful conflict Napoleon threw himself into the very midst of the firing, and with his own hands pointed two of the guns so as to cut off the only chance of the Austrians advancing to destroy the little wooden bridge. His reckless disregard of his own personal safety won for him from his soldiers the sobriquet of "the little corporal." Four days afterwards he entered Milan with all the pomp and circumstance of a great triumph, and scarcely pausing to look about him the conqueror hurried on to further victories.

At the bridge of Arcola, where Napoleon again met the Austrian forces, under Alrinzi, he gained a signal victory after three days' severe fighting. On the first

day at Arcola, at a critical moment when he saw the necessity of holding the bridge at all hazards, he seized a standard, and rushing upon the bridge urged the men to the charge. So terrible was the confusion of this battle that Napoleon himself was lost in the fury of the charge, and, sinking in the morass of the Adige, came near losing his life, when his situation was discovered by the French soldiers, who rushed forward with the cry, "Save the general," and rescued him. The battle of Rivoli followed, in which he had three horses shot under him. This was one of the brightest days in his military career; his victory was complete; but scarcely waiting to witness the surrender of the Austrian general, he hurried off, and marching all night and all the next day, reached the neighborhood of Mantua on the 15th of January. The night after this hurried march, which had strained all the energies of his troops, Napoleon scarcely slept at all; but knowing that the utmost watchfulness was necessary, himself patrolled the camp and outposts of his army. Coming upon a young sentinel who had fallen asleep through utter exhaustion, Napoleon took his musket and for half an hour performed sentinel duty for him. On waking and recognizing his commander the soldier fell on his knees before him and asked for mercy. Napoleon returned his gun and said to him, "My friend, you had fought hard and marched long, and your sleep is excusable; but a moment's inattention might at present ruin the army. I happened to be awake, and have held your post for you. You will be more careful another time."

On the 2d of February Mantua surrendered; and this placed the whole of Lombardy in the hands of the

conqueror. A provisional treaty was signed at Loeben, April 18, 1797, and a final settlement made at Campo Formio, October 3 of the same year. In the ceremony concluding and celebrating this treaty of peace, Napoleon's character shone out in unmistakable colors. At the Te Deum, sung in honor of the occasion, the Austrian envoy essayed to take the place set apart for Napoleon, which was the most prominent in the church. Napoleon drew him back, haughtily saying: "Had your imperial master himself been here, I should not have forgotten that in my person the dignity of France is represented."

On his return to Paris after his brilliant Italian campaigns, Napoleon led a life of retirement in a modest house on the Rue de la Victorie, so named in compliment of its illustrious inhabitant. His manners when he mingled in society were cold and reserved; he seemed always occupied with serious designs. His haughtiness in society was but a repetition of his demeanor in camp. With his officers he constantly maintained the air of a superior; but a trooper in the ranks could address him with a freedom that a brother officer would have hesitated to assume. So great was the popularity of Bonaparte, who was everywhere gazed at and admired as the hero of Lodi, Arcola and Rivoli, that the Directory growing jealous of his rising power, thought it prudent to find occupation for him in his own profession. Accordingly they proposed that he should make a descent upon the English coast; that country being the only great power then at war with France. But Napoleon's mind turned in another direction, and he proposed the invasion of Egypt.

The Directory, only too glad to be rid of so dan-

gerous a rival, assented; and he was given means to carry out his designs. The expedition set sail from Toulon in May, 1798, and comprised 13 ships of the line, 14 frigates, and 400 transports. They carried 40,000 picked soldiers and officers who were accustomed to consider the name of their leader as but a synonym for victory. On the 10th of June the fleet reached Malta. This old fortress yielded an easy conquest to the French forces. From Malta the fleet steered for Candia, and eluding the English admiral, Nelson, who was in the Mediterranean with a powerful navy, Napoleon landed at Marabout, near Alexandria. Egypt was then a province of the Ottoman Empire, and was surprised at this invasion by a nation at peace with them.

The Turks made what resistance they could with a small force, hurriedly got together; but the French soon took the place, and for three hours Napoleon gave the old city up to the plunder of the soldiers, who committed the most horrible excesses. The only pretext made for this atrocity was the necessity for striking terror to the hearts of the populace, and so preventing them from answering to the call to arms of their military leaders.

Napoleon addressed a proclamation to the Egyptians as follows: "They will tell you that I come to destroy your religion; believe them not; answer that I am come to restore your rights, to punish the usurpers, and that I respect more than the Mamelukes ever did, God, his prophet and the Koran. Sheiks and imans, assure the people that we also are true Mussulmans. Is it not we that have ruined the pope and the knights of Malta? Thrice happy they who shall be with us!