

more devotion.' How could it be possible not to respect a man of such nobility of character? I trust you will soon have an opportunity of judging of this yourself. For God's sake, return!

LOUISE."

But these entreaties were all in vain. M. de Marmold arrived at Louis in time to see the queen; he delivered the letters of her friends, and did all that lay in his power to persuade her not to go to Rambouillet.

But Hortense held firmly to her intention. "You are right," said she. "All this is true; but I shall, nevertheless, go to the Empress Marie Louise, for it is my duty to do so. If unpleasant consequences should result from this step for me, I shall pay no attention to them, but merely continue to do my duty. Of all of us, the Empress Marie Louise must be the most unhappy, and must stand most in need of consolation; it is, therefore, at her side that I can be of most use, and nothing can alter my determination."

CHAPTER XV.

QUEEN HORTENSE AND THE EMPEROR ALEXANDER.

QUEEN HORTENSE had gone to Rambouillet, in spite of the entreaties and exhortations of her friends. The Empress Marie Louise had, however, received her with an air of embarrassment. She had told the queen that she was expecting her father, the Emperor of Austria,

and that she feared the queen's presence might make him feel ill at ease. Moreover, the young empress, although dejected and grave, was by no means so sorrowful and miserable as Hortense expected. The fate of her husband had not wounded the heart of Marie Louise as deeply as that of the Empress Josephine.

Hortense felt that she was not needed there; that the presence of the Emperor of Austria would suffice to console the Empress of France for her husband's overthrow. She thought of Josephine, who was so deeply saddened by Napoleon's fate; and finding that, instead of consoling, she only embarrassed the Empress Marie Louise, she hastened to relieve her of her presence.

And now, at last, Hortense bowed her proud, pure heart beneath the yoke of necessity; now, at last, she listened to the prayers and representations of her mother, who had returned to Malmaison, and of her friends, and went to Paris. It had been too often urged upon her that she owed it to her sons to secure their fortune and future, not to overcome her personal repugnance, and conform herself to this new command of duty.

She had, therefore, returned to Paris for a few days, and taken up her abode in her dwelling, whose present dreariness recalled, with sorrowful eloquence, the grandeur of the past.

These drawing-rooms, once the rendezvous of so many kings and princes, were now desolate, and bore on their soiled floors the footprints of the hostile soldiers who had recently been quartered there. At the czar's solici-

tation, they had now been removed; but the queen's household servants had also left it. Faithless and ungrateful, they had turned their backs on the setting sun, and fled from the storm that had burst over the head of their mistress.

The Emperor Alexander hastened to the queen's dwelling as soon as her arrival in Paris was announced, the queen advancing to meet him as far as the outermost antechamber.

"Sire," said she, with a soft smile, "I have no means of receiving you with due ceremony; my antechambers are deserted."

The appearance of this solitary woman, this queen without a crown, without fortune, and without protection and support, who nevertheless stood before him in all the charms of beauty and womanhood, a soft smile on her lips, made a deep impression on the emperor, and his eyes filled with tears.

The queen observed this, and hastened to say, "But what of that? I do not think that antechambers filled with gold-embroidered liveries would make those who come to see me happier, and I esteem myself happy in being able to do you the honors of my house alone. I have, therefore, only won."

The emperor took her hand, and, while conducting the queen to her room, conversed with her, with that soft, sad expression peculiar to him, lamenting with bitter self-reproaches almost that he was himself, in part, to blame for the misfortunes that had overtaken the em-

peror and his family. He then conjured her to abandon her intention of leaving France, and to preserve herself for her mother and friends. He told her that, in abandoning her country, her friends, and her rights, she would be guilty of a crime against her own children, against her two sons, who were entitled to demand a country and a fortune at her hands.

The queen, overcome at last by these earnest and eloquent representations, declared her readiness to remain in France, if the welfare of her sons should require it.

"Until now," said she, "I had formed all my resolutions with reference to misfortune. I was entirely resigned, and I never thought of the possibility of any thing fortunate happening for me; and even yet, I do not know what I can desire and demand. I am, however, determined to accept nothing for myself and children that would be unworthy of us, and I do not know what that could be."

With an assuring smile, the emperor extended his hand to the queen. "Leave that to me," said he. "It is, then, understood, you are to remain in France?"

"Sire, you have convinced me that the future of my sons requires it. I shall therefore remain."
