

CHAPTER XVI.

THE NEW UNCLES.

MALMAISON, to which place Hortense had returned after a short stay in Paris, and where the Empress Josephine was also sojourning, was a kind of focus for social amusement and relaxation for the sovereigns assembled in Paris. Each of these kings and princes wished to pay his homage to the Empress Josephine and her daughter, and thereby, in a measure, show the last honors to the dethroned emperor.

On one occasion, when the King of Prussia, with his two sons, Prince Frederick William (the late king) and William, had come to Malmaison, and announced their desire to call on the empress, she sent them an invitation to a family dinner, at which she also invited the Emperor of Russia and his two brothers to attend.

The emperor accepted this invitation, and on entering, with the young archdukes, the parlor in which the Duchess de St. Leu was sitting, he took his two brothers by the hand and conducted them to Hortense.

"Madame," said he, "I confide my brothers to your keeping. They are now making their *début* in society. My mother fears their heads may be turned by the beauties of France; and in bringing them to Malmaison, where so many charming persons are assembled, I am certainly fulfilling my promise to preserve them from such a fate but poorly."

"Reassure yourself, sire," replied the queen, gravely; "I will be their mentor, and I promise you a motherly surveillance."

The emperor laughed, and, pointing to Hortense's two sons, who had just been brought in, he said: "Ah, madame, it would be much less dangerous for my brothers if they were of the age of these boys."

He approached the two boys with extended hands, and while conversing with them in a kindly and affectionate manner, addressed them with the titles "mon-seigneur" and "imperial highness."

The children regarded him wonderingly, for the Russian emperor was the first to address the little Napoleon and his younger brother, Louis Napoleon, with these imposing titles. The queen had never allowed them to be called by any but their own names. She wished to preserve them from vain pride, and teach them to depend on their own intrinsic merit.

Shortly afterward the King of Prussia and his sons were announced, and the emperor and his brothers left the young princes, and advanced to meet the king.

While the emperor and the king were exchanging salutations, Hortense's two sons inquired of their governess the names of the gentlemen who had just entered.

"It is the King of Prussia," whispered the governess; "and the gentleman who has just spoken with you is the Emperor of Russia."

The little Louis Napoleon regarded the tall figures of these princes thoughtfully for a moment, by no means

impressed by their imposing titles. He was so accustomed to see his mother surrounded by kings, and these kings had always been his uncles.

"Mademoiselle," said the little Louis Napoleon, after a short pause, "are these two new gentlemen, the emperor and the king, also our uncles, like all the others, and must we call them so?"

"No, Louis, you must simply call them 'sire.'"

"But," said the boy, after a moment's reflection, "why is it that they are not our uncles?"

The governess withdrew with the two children to the back of the parlor, and explained to them, in a low voice, that the emperors and kings then in Paris, far from being their uncles, were their vanquishers.

"Then," exclaimed the elder boy, Napoleon Louis, his face flushing with anger, "then they are the enemies of my uncle, the emperor! Why did this Emperor of Russia embrace us?"

"Because he is a noble and generous enemy, who is endeavoring to serve you and your mother in your present misfortune. Without him you would possess nothing more in the world, and the fate of your uncle, the emperor, would be much sadder than it already is."

"Then we ought to love this emperor very dearly?" said the little Louis Napoleon.

"Certainly; for you owe him many thanks."

The young prince regarded the emperor, who was conversing with the empress Josephine, long and thoughtfully.

When the emperor returned to Malmaison on the following day, and while he was sitting at his mother's side in the garden-house, little Louis Napoleon, walking on tiptoe, noiselessly approached the emperor from behind, laid a small glittering object in his hand, and ran away.

The queen called him back, and demanded with earnest severity to know what he had done.

The little prince returned reluctantly, hanging his head with embarrassment, and said, blushing deeply: "Ah, *maman*, it is the ring Uncle Eugene gave me. I wished to give it to the emperor, because he is so good to my *maman*!"

Deeply touched, the emperor took the boy in his arms, seated him on his knees, and kissed him tenderly.

Then, in order to give the little prince an immediate reward, he attached the ring to his watch-chain, and swore that he would wear the token as long as he lived.*

CHAPTER XVII.

DEATH OF THE EMPRESS JOSEPHINE.

SINCE Napoleon's star had grown pale, and himself compelled to leave France as an exile, life seemed to Josephine also to be enveloped in a gloomy mourning-veil; she felt that her sun had set, and night come upon her.

* Cochelet, vol. i., p. 355.