

Benjamin Constant, who had with great rapidity transformed himself from an enthusiastic royalist into an imperial state-councillor, came to the queen's parlors and regaled her guests by reading to them his romance Adolphe; and Metternich, the Austrian ambassador, seemed to have no other destiny than to amuse the queen and the circle of ladies assembled around them, and to invent new social games for their entertainment.

Metternich knew how to bring thousands of charming little frivolities into fashion; he taught the ladies the charming and poetic language of flowers, and made it a symbolic means of conversation and correspondence in the queen's circle. He also, to the great delight of the court, invented the alphabet of gems; in this alphabet each gem represented its initial letter, and, by combinations, names and devices were formed, which were worn in necklaces, bracelets, and rings.

The little games with which the diplomatic Metternich occupied himself during the hundred days at the imperial court at Paris, were, it appears, of the most innocent and harmless nature.

CHAPTER XIII.

NAPOLEON'S LAST ADIEU.

THE storm, of the approach of which Queen Hortense had so long had a foreboding, was preparing to burst over France. All the princes of Europe who had once been Napoleon's allies had now declared against him. They

all refused to acknowledge Napoleon as emperor, or to treat with him as one having any authority.

"No peace, no reconciliation with this man," wrote the Emperor Alexander to Pozzo di Borgo; "all Europe is of the same opinion concerning him. With the exception of this man, any thing they may demand; no preference for any one; no war after this man shall have been set aside."*

But, in order to "set this man aside," war was necessary. The allied armies therefore advanced toward the boundaries of France; the great powers declared war against France, or rather against the Emperor Napoleon; and France, which had so long desired peace, and had only accepted the Bourbons because it hoped to obtain it of them, France was now compelled to take up the gauntlet.

On the 12th of June the emperor left Paris with his army, in order to meet the advancing enemy. Napoleon himself, who had hitherto gone into battle, his countenance beaming with an assurance of victory, now looked gloomy and dejected, for he well knew that on the fate of his army now depended his own, and the fate of France.

This time it was not a question of making conquests, but of saving the national independence, and it was the mother-earth, red with the blood of her children, that was now to be defended.

Paris, that for eighty days had been the scene of splen-

* Cochelet, vol. iii., p. 90.

dor and festivity, now put on its mourning attire. All rejoicings were at an end, and every one listened hopefully to catch the first tones of the thunder of a victorious battle.

But the days of victory were over; the cannon thundered, the battle was fought, but instead of a triumph it was an overthrow.

At Waterloo, the eagles that had been consecrated on the first of June, on the *Champ de Mai*, sank in the dust; the emperor returned to Paris, a fugitive, and broken down in spirit, while the victorious allies were approaching the capital.

At the first intelligence of his return, Hortense hastened to the *Élysée*, where he had taken up his residence, to greet him. During the last few days she had been a prey to gloomy thoughts; now that the danger had come, now when all were despairing, she was composed, resolute, and ready to stand at the emperor's side to the last.

Napoleon was lost, and Hortense knew it; but he now had most need of friends, and she remained true, while so many of his nearest friends and relatives were deserting him.

On the twenty-second day of June the emperor sent in his abdication in favor of his son, the King of Rome, to the chambers; and a week later the chambers proclaimed Napoleon's son Emperor of France, under the name of Napoleon II.

But this emperor was a child of four years, and was,

moreover, not in France, but in the custody of the Emperor of Austria, whose army was now marching on Paris with hostile intent!

Napoleon, now no longer Emperor of France, had been compelled to take the crown from his head a second time; and for the second time he quitted Paris to await the destiny to be appointed him by the allies.

This time he did not repair to Fontainebleau, but to Malmaison—to Malmaison, that had once been Josephine's paradise, and where her heart had at last bled to death. This charming resort had passed into the possession of Queen Hortense; and Napoleon, who but yesterday had ruled over a whole empire, and to-day could call nothing, not even the space of ground on which he stood, his own, Napoleon asked Hortense to receive him at Malmaison.

Hortense accorded his request joyfully, and, when her friends learned this, and in their dismay and anxiety conjured her not to identify in this manner herself and children with the fate of the emperor, but to consider well the danger that would result from such a course, the queen replied resolutely: "That is an additional reason for holding firm to my determination. I consider it my sacred duty to remain true to the emperor to the last, and the greater the danger that threatens the emperor, the happier I shall be in having it in my power to show him my entire devotion and gratitude."

And when, in this decision, when her whole future hung in the balance, one of her most intimate lady-friends

ventured to remind the queen of the disgraceful and malicious reports that had once been put in circulation with regard to her relation to Napoleon, and suggested that she would give new strength to them by now receiving the emperor at Malmaison, Hortense replied with dignity: "What do I care for these calumnies? I fulfil the duty imposed on me by feeling and principle. The emperor has always treated me as his child; I shall therefore ever remain his devoted and grateful daughter; it is my first and greatest necessity to be at peace with myself." *

Hortense therefore repaired with the emperor to Malmaison, and the faithful, who were not willing to leave him in his misfortune, gathered around him, watched over his life, and gave to his residence a fleeting reflection of the old grandeur and magnificence. For they who now stood around Napoleon, guarding his person from any immediate danger that threatened him at the hands of fanatic enemies or hired assassins, were marshals, generals, dukes, and princes.

But Napoleon's fate was already decided—it was an inevitable one, and when the intelligence reached Malmaison that the enemy was approaching nearer and nearer, and that resistance was no longer made anywhere, and when Napoleon saw that all was lost, his throne, his crown, and even the love which he imagined he had for ever built up for himself in the hearts of the French people by his great deeds and victories—when he saw this he determined to fly, no matter whither, but away from the

* Cochelet, vol. iii., p. 149.

France that would no longer rally to his call, the France that had abandoned him.

The emperor resolved to fly to Rochefort, and to embark there in order to return to Elba. The provisional government that had established itself in Paris, and had sent an ambassador to Napoleon at Malmaison with the demand that he should depart at once, now instructed this ambassador to accompany the emperor on his journey, and not to leave him until he should have embarked.

Napoleon was ready to comply with this demand. He determined to depart on the afternoon of the 30th of June. He had nothing more to do but to take leave of his friends and family. He did this with cold, tearless composure, with an immovable, iron countenance; no muscle of his face quivered, and his glance was severe and imperious.

But, when Hortense brought in her two sons, when he had clasped them in his arms for the last time, then a shadow passed over his countenance; then his pale compressed lips quivered, and he turned away to conceal the tears that stood in his eyes.

But Hortense had seen them, and in her heart she preserved the remembrance of these tears as the most precious gem of her departed fortune. As the emperor then turned to her to bid her adieu in his former cold and immovable manner, Hortense, who well knew that a volcano of torments must be glowing under this cold lava, entreated him to grant her a last favor.

A painful smile illumined the emperor's countenance

for a moment. There was, it seemed, still something that he could grant; he was not altogether powerless! With a mute inclination of the head he signified his assent. Hortense handed him a broad black belt.

"Sire," said she, "wear this belt around your body and beneath your clothing. Conceal it carefully, but in the time of necessity remember it and open it."

The emperor took the belt in his hand, and its weight startled him.

"What does it contain?" asked he: "I must know what it contains!"

"Sire," said Hortense, blushing and hesitating: "Sire, it is my large diamond necklace that I have taken apart and sewed in this belt. Your majesty may need money in a critical moment, and you will not deny me this last happiness, your acceptance of this token."

The emperor refused, but Hortense entreated him so earnestly that he was at last compelled to yield, and accept this love-offering.

They then took a hasty and mute leave of each other, and Hortense, in order to hide her tears, hastened with her children from the room.

The emperor summoned a servant, and ordered that no one else should be admitted; but at this moment the door was hastily thrown open, and a national guard entered the room.

"Talma!" exclaimed the emperor, almost gayly, as he extended his hand.

"Yes, Talma, sire," said he, pressing the emperor's

hand to his lips. "I disguised myself in this dress, in order that I might get here to take leave of your majesty."

"To take leave, never to see each other more," said the emperor, sadly. "I shall never be able to admire you in your great rôles again, Talma. I am about to depart, never to return again. You will play the emperor on many an evening, but not I, Talma! My part is at an end!"

"No, sire, you will always remain the emperor!" exclaimed Talma, with generous enthusiasm; "the emperor, although without the crown and the purple robe."

"And also the emperor without a people," said Napoleon.

"Sire, you have a people that will ever remain yours, and a throne that is imperishable! It is the throne that you have erected for yourself on the battle-fields, that will be recorded in the books of history. And every one, no matter to what nation he may belong, who reads of your great deeds, will be inspired by them, and will acknowledge himself to be one of your people, and bow down before the emperor in reverence."

"I have no people," murmured Napoleon, gloomily; "they have all deserted—all betrayed me, Talma!"

"Sire, they will some day regret, as Alexander of Russia will also one day regret, having deserted the great man he once called brother!" And, in his delicate and generous endeavor to remind Napoleon of one of his moments of grandeur, Talma continued: "Your majesty

perhaps remembers that evening at Tilsit, when the Emperor of Russia made you so tender a declaration of his love, publicly and before the whole world? But no, you cannot remember it; for you it was a matter of no moment; but I—I shall never forget it! It was at the theatre; we were playing 'Œdipus.' I looked up at the box in which your majesty sat, between the King of Prussia and the Emperor Alexander. I could see you only—the second Alexander of Macedon, the second Julius Cæsar—and I held my arms aloft and saw you only when I repeated the words of my part: 'The friendship of a great man is a gift of the gods!' And as I said this, the Emperor Alexander arose and pressed you to his heart. I saw this, and tears choked my utterance. The audience applauded rapturously; this applause was, however, not for me, but for the Emperor Alexander!"*

While Talma was speaking, his cheeks glowing and his eyes flashing, a rosy hue suffused the emperor's countenance, and, for an instant, he smiled. Talma had attained his object; he had raised up the humiliated emperor with the recital of his own grandeur.

Napoleon thanked him with a kindly glance, and extended his hand to bid him adieu.

As Talma approached the emperor, a carriage was heard driving up in front of the house. It was Letitia, the emperor's mother, who had come to take leave of her son. Talma stood still, in breathless suspense; in his

* This scene is entirely historical. See Bossuet, Mémoires; Bourrienne, Mémoires; Cochelet and Une Femme de Qualité.

heart he thanked Providence for permitting him to witness this leave-taking.

"Madame mère" walked past Talma in silence, and without observing him. She saw only her son, who stood in the middle of the room, his sombre and flashing glance fastened on her with an unutterable expression. Now they stood face to face, mother and son. The emperor's countenance remained immovable as though hewn out of marble.

They stood face to face in silence, but two great tears slowly trickled down the mother's cheeks. Talma stood in the background, weeping bitterly. Napoleon remained unmoved. Letitia now raised both hands and extended them to the emperor. "Adieu, my son!" said she, in full and sonorous tones.

Napoleon pressed her hands in his own, and gazed at her long and fixedly; and then, with the same firmness, he said: "My mother, adieu!"

Once more they gazed at each other; then the emperor let her hand fall. Letitia turned to go, and at this moment General Bertrand appeared at the door to announce that all was prepared for the journey.*

* This leave-taking was exactly as above described, and Talma himself narrated it to Louise de Cochelet. See her Mémoires, vol. iii., p. 173.