

CHAPTER XLIII.

THE KING OF ROME.

THE emperor, with a joyful exclamation, turned toward the door. On its threshold stood a boy of remarkable beauty, such as Correggio or Murillo would have selected as a cherub model. His slender but vigorous form was clothed in sky-blue velvet, embroidered with silver, and his fairy-like feet wore shoes of the same color. His dimpled arms were bare, and a fleece of golden ringlets fell on his fair neck and shoulders. An ingenuousness, undeformed by bad training, increased the charm of his natural beauty. There was nothing affected in his blooming face; and, while a happy temper played about his lips, there was a light in his large blue eyes, reminding the beholder of his great father, from whom he also inherited a forehead which, when the attractions of his childhood had passed away, would at once assert his manly gravity and thought.

Behind the boy appeared the dignified form of Madame de Montesquiou, his governess, who seemed to take pains to keep back the boy, and, seizing his hand, hastily whispered a few words to him. But he forcibly disengaged himself, and, without noticing any one but the emperor, rushed toward him with open arms. "Papa," he cried, in an imploring tone—"papa, have you not given me permission to come to you at any time?"

"Yes, sire," said the emperor, tenderly, lifting him into his arms, "and the proof of it is that you are here."

"Well, dear 'Quiou," asked the boy, in a triumphant tone, turning toward Madame de Montesquiou—"did I not tell you so?—The usher would not admit me, papa, though I told him I am the King of Rome!"

"He ran away from me," said the governess, "in the first anteroom, and so fast that I could not follow him."

"It was because I wanted to see my dear papa emperor," cried the child, fixing his eyes with an expression of indescribable tenderness on his father.

"But that was the reason, sire," said the governess, "why the usher would not immediately open the door to you. He did not know whether he was allowed to do so, and waited, therefore, until I came."

"But why did he not know that he was allowed to do so?" cried the little king, impetuously. "Did I not tell him, 'I will it, I am the King of Rome?' Pray tell me, papa emperor, do not the ushers obey you either when you say, 'I will it?'"

The emperor laughed as loudly and merrily as he had done in the days of his prosperity, and the ministers and Baron Fontaine joined heartily in his mirth; even Madame de Montesquiou could not suppress a faint smile. The boy saw it, and asked hastily, "Why do you laugh, 'Quiou? Did I say any thing ridiculous?"

"No, rather something charming," said the emperor, smiling, laying his hand on the blond head of his child, and pressing it closer to his breast. With the child still in his arms, he seated himself in an easy-chair, and, placing the little fair-haired king on his knee, gazed at him with joyful eyes. His whole countenance was changed, and beaming with mildness; even his voice assumed another tone, and seemed incapable of command or threat.

"Sire," said the emperor, "we were just speaking of you."

"Ah," cried the child, with an arch smile, "I know what it was! My papa emperor was thinking of a New-Year's present!"

"But, sire," exclaimed the governess, sharply, "it is unseemly to ask for presents."

A blush suffused the child's face, and seemed reflected on the pale cheeks of the emperor, who felt almost pained at seeing him so much ashamed of himself.

"Madame," he said, turning hastily to the governess, "I have to ask a favor of you: pray leave the King of Rome here with me for a time. I myself will take him back to you, and I promise to watch carefully over his majesty."

Madame de Montesquiou made a ceremonious obeisance; the little king kissed his hand to her, and she then left the cabinet. No sooner had the door closed than the boy, with a smile, encircled the emperor's neck with his arms, and cried, "Now we are alone, papa emperor!"

"Oh, no!" said the emperor, smiling, "did you not yet see these gentlemen?"

"No," said the child, looking round in surprise, "I saw only you, papa!"

Never had the lips of the most beautiful woman uttered words that gladdened his heart so much as these. But before

his ministers he was almost ashamed of his sensitiveness, and, therefore, he forced himself to assume a graver air. "Sire," he said, "above all, you must greet these gentlemen; they are my ministers, and very dear friends of mine."

"Ah, then they are friends of mine, too," cried the boy, with that politeness which comes from the heart. Quickly descending from his father's knee to the carpet on the floor, the little King of Rome walked several steps toward the gentlemen, and bowed so deeply to them that his blond ringlets rolled down over his face. "Pardon me, gentlemen," he said, "if I did not see and greet you! I came to my papa emperor because to-day is a holiday, and I desired to wish him a happy New-Year. I see you now, gentlemen, and, if you will permit me, I wish you all, too, a happy New-Year."

The gentlemen bowed, and looked with an expression of gentle sympathy and emotion on the lovely child, as if imploring the blessing of Heaven upon him. The emperor probably read this in their eyes, for he greeted the gentlemen with a pleasant smile, and nodded to them with the triumphant air of a happy father.

"Papa emperor," exclaimed the child, turning once more to his father, "my dear Madame 'Quiou says that France has now need of prosperity, and that I, therefore, ought to pray the good God to grant us His favor."

"Well, and did you do so?" inquired the emperor.

"Yes," replied the child, "I did, from the bottom of my heart."

"How did you pray? Let me hear, sire; it can do no harm if you pray to God once more to grant us His favor. What did you say?"

The child assumed a grave air, and knelt down. He then raised his clasped hands, and, leaning back his head, lifted up his large blue eyes. "Good God," he said aloud, "I pray to Thee for France and for my father!"

These words, uttered in so clear and melodious a voice, sounding like an angel's greeting in the solemn cabinet of the emperor, made a wonderful impression. The gentlemen averted their heads, to conceal their emotion from Napoleon. But he paid no attention to them; his eyes rested on his child with an expression of profound affection; a veil seemed to overspread them, and as it perhaps prevented the emperor from seeing his kneeling child distinctly, he quickly moved his hand

across his eyes. The veil disappeared, but the hand that had drawn it aside was moist.

The boy jumped up and hastened back to his father, who clasped him tenderly in his arms, and then, as if to apologize, turned toward his ministers. "Well, gentlemen," he said, gayly, "do you believe that the voice of the King of Rome is strong enough to reach to heaven, and bring prosperity to France and to myself?"

"Sire, I do," said the Duke de Bassano, in a trembling voice.

"And I feel convinced of it," said the Duke de Rovigo. "If any prayer can reach heaven, this must."

"It will bless France and her august emperor," said the Duke de Vicenza. "Sire, permit me to ask a favor of you. Give to France as a New-Year's present of your love, the picture of the King of Rome praying for France and his father. Your majesty, send for Isabey, and have him represent the king in this charming attitude. He will paint such a picture both with his hand and his heart, and within a month it must be circulated as a copperplate throughout France. Sire, I venture to assert that this engraving will win all hearts, and the members of the legislature cannot excite half as much hatred in the provinces as this picture will produce love."

"You are right," said the emperor, "that is an excellent idea. France shall learn that my son prays, first for it, and then for me.—Maret, see to it that Isabey come to-morrow. The plate must be ready for distribution in the course of a month.* And now," added the emperor, putting the child again on his knee, "now tell me what do you want me to give you as a New-Year's present?"

"Oh," cried the little king, smiling, "I know something, dear papa emperor, but I dare not say what it is."

"Ah, you may," said the emperor. "I pledge you my word that I will fulfil your wish, if it be possible. Speak, then."

"Sire," asked little Napoleon, nodding toward the ministers, "sire, will these gentlemen not betray me to Madame de Montesquiou?"

"I warrant you they will not," said the emperor, gravely. "Let me hear what you want."

* This copperplate really appeared shortly after; it is a sweet and beautiful portrait of the little King of Rome.

"Well, then, papa emperor," said the boy, leaning his head on his father's breast, and looking up to him, "I feel a great wish that I could run just once all alone into the street, and play in the mud and the gutter, as other children do."*

The emperor burst into loud laughter, in which the others did not fail to join. "Ah, you see, gentlemen," exclaimed the emperor, "this is a new rendering of Lafontaine's celebrated '*Toujours perdrix!*' The King of Rome, being able to command all that is beautiful and agreeable to his heart's content, is longing for the gutter.—Be patient, sire, I cannot immediately fulfil your wish, but I shall have a palace for you, and in its court-yard you shall have a gutter, too. Sire, look at those plans which Baron Fontaine has drawn up for a palace destined for you alone."

"What! For me alone?" asked the child, in dismay. "You will not live with me in the palace?"

"No, sire. The King of Rome must have a palace of his own where he will reside with his court."

"Papa emperor, I thank you for your New-Year's gift," said the boy, sullenly; "I thank you, but do not accept it. I do not want a palace of my own. I thank your majesty, but prefer remaining at the Tuileries."

"But, sire, just think of it—a splendid palace belonging to you alone!"

"I do not want to live alone!"

"Well, sire, then you will request your beautiful mother, the empress, to live with you. Will that be sufficient?"

The boy glanced quickly and anxiously around the room, as if to satisfy himself that neither the empress nor Madame de Montesquiou was present; he then threw both his arms round the emperor's neck, and exclaimed, "I want to be where you are, papa!"

Napoleon pressed his lips with passionate tenderness on his son's head. "Well, sire," he said, in a voice tremulous with love, "I believe your wishes will have to be complied with. As soon as your palace is completed I shall live with you. Do you accept your palace on this condition?"

"Yes, my dear papa emperor," exclaimed the prince, joyously, "now I accept it, and thank you for it."

"Well, you hear that, Fontaine," said Napoleon, turning toward his architect. "You may begin the construction of the palace; the King of Rome accepts it. I sanction this

*Bausset, "Mémoires sur Intérieur du Palais Impérial," vol. ii.

second plan. Build a magnificent villa, and it must be completed in two years. In two years—"

Suddenly the emperor paused, and his face darkened. "Ah," he said, gloomily, putting his hand on the prince's head, "ah, we purpose building you a palace, but if they conquer me you will not even possess a cabin!"* The emperor's head dropped on his breast, and a pause ensued, which the child, usually so vivacious, did not venture to interrupt.

At length Napoleon said: "Go, Fontaine, and take your plans along; I will confer further about the matter. And you, ministers, come, we have to settle some questions of importance. But, first, I must take the king back to his governess."

The boy clung with almost anxious tenderness to his father. "Ah, dear, dear papa emperor," he begged, "let me stay here! I will be quiet—oh, so very quiet! I will only sit on your knee, lean my head on your breast, and not disturb you at all."

"Well, you may stay then," said Napoleon. "We shall see whether you really can be quiet and not disturb us."

The little child kept his word. Sitting quietly on the emperor's knee, and leaning his little head on his father's breast, he did not interrupt in the least the important conference of Napoleon and his ministers. An hour afterward the conference was over, and the dukes were dismissed.

"Now, sire," said Napoleon, turning toward the child, now "let us play."

But the little king, who always received these words with exultation, remained silent, and when the emperor bent over him, he saw that he had fallen asleep. "Happy king!" murmured Napoleon, "happy king! who can fall asleep in the midst of state business!" Softly and cautiously drawing the boy closer to his breast, and taking pains not to disturb his slumber, he sat still and motionless, scarcely breathing, although sad thoughts oppressed his mind. It was an interesting spectacle—this lovely boy leaning his head in smiling dreams on the breast of his father, who was looking down on him with grave and tender eyes.

The emperor sat thus a long time. Strange and wonderful thoughts stole upon him—thoughts of past happiness, of past love. He thought of how long he had yearned to possess a son, and how many tears his first consort shed—how ardently

*Napoleon's words.—Vide "Memoirs of the Duchess d'Abrantes."

he had been loved by the noble and beautiful Josephine, whom, in his pride, which demanded an heir-apparent, he had thrust into solitude. Providence had given Bonaparte all that his heart had longed for—a beautiful young wife, who loved him, and who was the daughter of an emperor; and a sweet, lovely child that was to be the heir of his imperial throne. But Providence, by giving him all, had taken all from Josephine—the heart and hand of her husband, her dignity and authority as an empress and sovereign. She was now nothing but a deserted and unhappy lady, who had only tears for her past, no joy in the present, no hopes for the future.

All this was on account of the child adored by his father, and hailed by France; and yet, despite all the mischief this little boy had done her and the fact that he was the child of another woman, Josephine loved him, and often implored the emperor to let her see and embrace the little King of Rome. He had always refused to grant this request, in order not to stir up the jealousy of his young wife, but, at this quiet hour, when he was alone with his sleeping child, Napoleon thought of Josephine with melancholy tenderness. Amid the profound silence which surrounded him, his recollections spoke to him. They pointed him to Josephine in the imperishable splendor of her love, her grace, and goodness; he thought he saw her sweet lips, which had always a smile for him; her brilliant eyes, which had ever looked tenderly on him, and which had learned to read his most secret thoughts.

"Poor Josephine!" he murmured, "poor Josephine! she loved me ardently, and many things might be different now if she were still by my side. She was my guardian angel, and with her my success has departed. She sacrificed her happiness to me and my ambition; and while formerly all hastened to offer congratulations on this day and pay homage to the empress, she now sits lonely and deserted at Malmaison.—No," he then said aloud, "no, she shall not be lonely and deserted! I surely owe it to her to occasion her a moment of joy. She shall see my son—I myself will take him to her." He cautiously lifted up the boy in his arms and rose. The prince awoke and looked smilingly up to his father, who carried him to the sofa and laid him with tender care on the cushions. But little Napoleon jumped up, and said laughingly. "I am no longer tired. The dukes are gone now, and let us play, papa!"

"No, sire," said the emperor, "not now, I have business to attend to. But listen to me: at noon to-day I will take a ride with you, all alone—that is to be my New-Year's present."

The boy uttered a cry of joy. "All alone, papa emperor? Oh, that will be splendid!"

"But now go to Madame de Montesquiou, sire," said the emperor.—"Constant!" When the valet de chambre entered the room, he ordered Constant, "Pray conduct his majesty the King of Rome to Madame de Montesquiou, and tell her I shall call for him in a few hours in order to take a ride with him alone, without any attendants whatever.—Adieu, Sire, in a few hours we shall meet again."

But the boy stood and looked at the emperor with grave and sullen glances. "Sire," he said, "my dear Madame 'Quiou tells me often a king ought to keep his word. Now I ask you must an emperor not keep his word also?"

"Certainly, sire!"

"Well, then, your majesty, take me to Madame 'Quiou," cried the boy, joyously; "you told her you would do so. Come, papa!"

"Ah," exclaimed the emperor, smiling, "you are right—an emperor must fulfil his word, though he has pledged it only to a king. Come, sire, I will conduct you to Madame de Montesquiou. Constant, await me here!"

A few minutes afterward, the emperor returned to his cabinet. "Constant," he said, in a low voice, "I know you loved the Empress Josephine, and have not forgotten her, I suppose?"

"Sire, the empress was my benefactress; I owe to her all that I am, and she was always kind to me."

"More so than the present empress, you mean to say?" asked the emperor, casting a searching glance on his valet de chambre; and, as Constant was silent, Napoleon added, "It is true, the young empress is less condescending than my first consort. But that is, Constant, because she was brought up as the daughter of an emperor, and her feelings were restrained by the narrow limits of etiquette. Josephine forgot too much that she was an empress, Maria Louisa forgets it too little; but her heart is good and gentle, and she would never wish to grieve me. So, Constant, you have not yet forgotten the Empress Josephine?"

"Sire, none that ever knew the Empress Josephine could

help remembering her. For my own part, I can never forget her."

"Ah, what a *fripon* you are, to give me such a reply! Well, I will prove to you, M. Fripon, that I have not forgotten Josephine, either. This is New-Year's-day. Would you not like to offer your congratulations to the Empress Josephine at Malmaison?"

"Sire, if so humble and low a servant as I am may dare, I should certainly be very happy to lay my congratulations at her feet."

"Go, I permit you to do so, and the empress will surely receive you very kindly."

"Particularly, sire, if I had a message from his majesty the emperor to deliver."

"Fripon, I believe you take the liberty of guessing my thoughts! Yes, I will give you a message. Hasten to the Empress Josephine, take her my greetings, but see that the empress receives you without witnesses.—Do you hear, Constant—without witnesses? Then tell her to have her carriage immediately brought to the door, and, on the pretext of being alone with her mournful New-Year's meditations, to take a ride without attendants. But when she is at a considerable distance from Malmaison, she is to order the coachman to drive to the little castle of La Bagatelle. She must be there precisely at four o'clock. I shall be there, and tell her majesty I shall not come alone. Now make haste, Constant! Recommend entire reticence to the empress. As to yourself, pray do not forget that, if any one shall hear of this affair, you must be held responsible. Go!"

CHAPTER XLIV.

JOSEPHINE.

JUST as the clock struck four, the carriage of the Empress Josephine wheeled into the courtyard of the little castle of La Bagatelle. She inquired of the castellan, in a tremulous voice, whether any one had arrived there, and she breathed more freely when he replied in the negative. She left the carriage with youthful alacrity and entered the castle, followed by the castellan, who gazed in amazement at this empress without court or suite, who arrived stealthily and tremblingly, like a

maiden to meet her lover for the first time. She hurried through the well-known apartments of the castle, and entered the hall in which, during the days of her happiness, she had so often received the foreign princes and ambassadors, or the dignitaries of France. The hall was now empty; no one was there to receive the deserted empress; but bright, merry fires were burning in the fireplaces, and every thing was in readiness for the reception of distinguished guests.

"You knew, then, that I was to come?" inquired the empress of the castellan.

"Your majesty," he replied, in a low and reverential voice, "M. Constant was here, and gave orders to have the rooms in readiness. If your majesty wishes refreshments, you will find every thing served up in the dining-room."

"No, no, I thank you," cried the empress, hastily. "But tell me is my dressing-room—my former dressing-room," she corrected herself falteringly—"is that heated, too?"

"Your majesty will find all your rooms comfortable, just as though you still condescended to reside here."

"Well, then, I will go to that room. If any one comes, I shall notice it through the opened doors; it is unnecessary for you to inform me; I will go then at once to the reception-room."

The castellan withdrew, and Josephine hastened through the adjoining apartment into the dressing-room. With a long, painful sigh she glanced around the room which had so often witnessed her happiness and her triumphs. Here, surrounded by her ladies in front of this mirror, she had had her hair dressed, and the emperor had almost always made his appearance at that hour to chat with her, look at her toilet, and delight her heart by a smile, a glance, that was more transporting to her than all the homage and flattery paid her by all her other admirers. Now she was here again, but alone, and with a mournful sigh she stepped to the mirror which had so often reflected her charming portrait, radiant with happiness, and sparkling with diamonds.

And what did she see now in this mirror? A woman with a pale, grief-stricken face, features growing old, and a desponding exhaustion which only a good and pleasant life can disguise when the vigor of youth has faded.

"Oh, I have become old!" sighed Josephine; "the years of tears and solitude count double, for one consumes then in days the strength of many years. I have grown old because I have