

CHAPTER V.

BIRTH OF LOUIS NAPOLEON AND
THE DIVORCE OF JOSEPHINE.

THE latter part of July, 1807, Hortense, in the state of anguish which the preceding chapter develops, was, with her husband, at the waters of Cauterets, in the south of France. They were united by the ties of a mutual grief. Napoleon was more than a thousand miles away in the north of Europe. In considerably less than a year from that date, on the 20th of April, 1808, Hortense gave birth in Paris to her third child, Louis Napoleon, now Napoleon III., Emperor of the French. Josephine was then at Bordeaux, and wrote as follows to Hortense:

“Bordeaux, April 23d, 1808.

“I am, my dear Hortense, in an excess of joy. The tidings of your happy accouchement were brought to me yesterday by M. de Villeneuve. I felt my heart beat the moment

I saw him enter. But I cherished the hope that he had only good tidings to bring me, and my presentiments did not deceive me. I have received a second letter, which assures me that you are very well, and also your son. I know that Napoleon will console himself in not having a sister, and that he already loves very much his brother. Embrace them both for me. But I must not write you too long a letter from fear of fatiguing you. Take care of yourself with the utmost caution. Do not receive too much company at present. Let me hear from you every day. I await tidings from you with as much impatience as I love you with tenderness. JOSEPHINE.”

The birth of this prince, Louis Napoleon, whose renown as Napoleon III. now fills the world, and respecting whose character and achievements there is so wonderful a diversity of sentiment among intelligent men, took place in Paris. Napoleon was at that time upon the highest pinnacle of prosperity. The Allies, vanquished in every conflict, seemed disposed to give up the attempt to reinstate the Bourbons upon the throne of France. The birth of Louis Napoleon, as a prince of the Empire,

Public announcement of the birth.

in the direct line of hereditary descent, was welcomed by the guns of the Invalides, and by military salutes all along the lines of the Imperial army, from Hamburg to Rome, and from the Pyrenees to the Danube. The important event was thus announced in the *Moniteur* of April 21st:

“Yesterday, at one o'clock, her Majesty the Queen of Holland was safely delivered of a prince. In conformity with Article 40, of the Act of the Constitution of 28 Floreal, year 12, the Chancellor of the Empire attested the birth, and wrote immediately to the Emperor, the Empress, and the King of Holland, to communicate the intelligence. At five o'clock in the evening, the act of birth was received by the arch chancellor, assisted by his eminence, Reynault de St. Jean d'Angely, minister of state and state secretary of the Imperial family. In the absence of the Emperor, the new-born prince has not yet received his name. This will be provided for by an ulterior act, according to the orders of his Majesty.”

By a decree of the Senate, these two children of Louis Bonaparte and Hortense were declared heirs to the Imperial throne, should Napoleon and his elder brother Joseph die

Napoleon's attachment to his nephews.

without children. This decree of the Senate was submitted to the acceptance of the French people. With wonderful unanimity it was adopted. There were 3,521,675 votes in the affirmative, and but 2599 in the negative.

Napoleon ever manifested the deepest interest in these two children. At the time of the birth of Louis Napoleon he was at Bayonne, arranging with the Spanish princes for the transfer of the crown of Spain to Joseph Bonaparte. Josephine was at Bordeaux. From this interview he passed, in his meteoric flight, to the Congress of Kings at Erfurt, but a few miles from the battle-field of Jena. It was here that the celebrated historian Müller met the Emperor and gave the following testimony as to the impression which his presence produced upon his mind:

“Quite impartially and truly, as before God, I must say, that the variety of his knowledge, the acuteness of his observation, the solidity of his understanding, filled me with astonishment. His manner of speaking to me inspired me with love for him. It was one of the most remarkable days of my life. By his genius and his disinterested goodness he has conquered me also.”

Letter from Napoleon.

Hortense, with a saddened spirit, now lived in great seclusion, devoting herself almost exclusively to the education of her two sons, Napoleon Louis and Louis Napoleon. Her bodily health was feeble, and she was most of the time deeply dejected. In May, 1809, Hortense, without consulting the Emperor, who was absent in Germany, took the two princes with her to the baths of Baden, where they were exposed to the danger of being seized and held as hostages by the Austrians. The solicitude of the Emperor for them may be seen in the following letter:

“Ebersdorf, May 28th, 1809.

“MY DAUGHTER,—I am very much displeased, (*très mécontent*) that you should have left France without my permission, and particularly that you should have taken my nephews from France. Since you are at the waters of Baden, remain there. But in one hour after the reception of this letter, send my two nephews to Strasbourg, near to the Empress. They ought never to leave France. It is the first time that I have had occasion to be dissatisfied with you. But you ought not to dispose of my nephews without my permission. You ought

Josephine to Hortense.

to perceive the mischievous effects which that may produce.

“Since the waters of Baden are beneficial to you, you can remain there some days. But I repeat to you, do not delay for a moment sending my nephews to Strasbourg. Should the Empress go to the waters of Plombières they can accompany her there. But they ought never to cross the bridge of Strasbourg. Your affectionate father,
 NAPOLEON.”

This letter was sent to Josephine to be transmitted by her to Hortense. She received it on the first of June, and immediately sent it to her daughter, with a letter which implies that Hortense had already anticipated the wishes of Napoleon, and had sent the princes, after a brief visit, to Josephine at Strasbourg. Soon after this it would seem that little Louis Napoleon, who was evidently the favorite of his grandmother, perhaps because he was more with her, accompanied Josephine to St. Cloud. About a fortnight after this she wrote to Hortense from that palace:

“I am happy to have your son with me. He is charming. I am attached to him more and more, in thinking he will be a solace to

Remarks of the Duke of Rovigo.

you. His little reasons amuse me much. He grows every day, and his complexion is very fine. I am far from you, but I frequently embrace your son, and love to imagine to myself that it is my dear daughter whom I embrace."

And now we approach that almost saddest of earth's tragedies, the divorce of Josephine—the great wrong and calamity of Napoleon's life. The event had so important a bearing upon the character and the destiny of Hortense as to demand a brief recital here.

It is often difficult to judge of the *motives* of human actions; but at times circumstances are such that it is almost impossible to misjudge the causes which lead to conduct. General Savary, Duke of Rovigo, the intimate personal friend of the Emperor, and one better acquainted with his secret thoughts than any other person, gives the following account of this momentous and fatal act:

"A thousand idle stories have been related concerning the Emperor's motives for breaking the bonds he had contracted upwards of fifteen years before, and separating from one who was the partner of his life during the most stormy events of his glorious career. It was ascribed

Remarks of the Duke of Rovigo.

to his ambition to connect himself with royal blood; and malevolence has delighted in spreading the report that to this consideration he had sacrificed every other. This opinion was quite erroneous, and he was as unfairly dealt with, upon the subject, as all persons are who happen to be placed above the level of mankind.

"Nothing can be more true than that the sacrifice of the object of his affections was the most painful that he experienced throughout his life; and that he would have preferred adopting any course than the one to which he was driven by the motives which I am about to relate. Public opinion in general was unjust to the Emperor, when he placed the imperial crown upon his head. A feeling of personal ambition was supposed to be the main-spring of all his actions. This was, however, a very mistaken impression. I have already mentioned with what reluctance he had altered the form of government, and that if he had not been apprehensive that the State would fall again a prey to those dissensions which are inseparable from an elective form of government, he would not have changed an order of things which appeared to have been the first solid conquest achieved by the revolution. Ever

Remarks of the Duke of Rovigo.

since he had brought back the nation to monarchical principles, he had neglected no means of consolidating institutions which permanently secured those principles, and yet firmly established the superiority of modern ideas over antiquated customs. Differences of opinion could no longer create any disturbance respecting the form of government, when his career should be closed.

“But this was not enough. It was further requisite that the line of inheritance should be defined in so clear a manner that, at his death, no pretense might be made for the contention of any claimants to the throne. For if such a misfortune were to take place, the least foreign intervention would have sufficed to revive a spirit of discord among us. This feeling of personal ambition consisted in this case, in a desire to hand his work down to posterity, and to resign to his successor a state resting upon his numerous trophies for its stability. He could not have been blind to the fact, that the perpetual warfare into which a jealousy of his strength had plunged him, had, in reality, no other object than his own downfall, because with him must necessarily crumble that gigantic power which was no longer upheld by

Remarks of the Duke of Rovigo.

the revolutionary energy he himself had repressed.

“The Emperor had not any children. The Empress had two, but he never could have entertained a thought of them without exposing himself to the most serious inconveniences. I believe, however, that if the two children of Josephine had been the only ones in his family, he would have made some arrangement for securing the inheritance to Eugene. He however dismissed the idea of appointing him his heir, because he had nearer relations, and it would have given rise to dissensions which it was his principal object to avoid. He also considered the necessity in which he was placed of forming an alliance sufficiently powerful, in order that, in the event of his system being at any time threatened, that alliance might be a resting-point, and save it from total ruin. He likewise hoped that it would be the means of putting to an end that series of wars, of which he was desirous, above all things, to avoid a recurrence. These were the motives which determined him to break a union so long contracted. He wished it less for himself than for the purpose of interesting a powerful state in the maintenance of the order of things established

Testimony of Cambaceres.

in France. He reflected often on the mode of making this communication to the Empress. Still he was reluctant to speak to her. He was apprehensive of the consequences of her tenderness of feeling. His heart was never proof against the shedding of tears."

The arch-chancellor Cambaceres states that Napoleon communicated to him the resolution he had adopted; alluded to the reasons for the divorce, spoke of the anguish which the stern necessity caused his affections, and declared his intention to invest the act with forms the most affectionate and the most honorable to Josephine.

"I will have nothing" said he, "which can resemble a repudiation; nothing but a mere dissolution of the conjugal tie, founded upon mutual consent; a consent itself founded upon the interests of the empire. Josephine is to be provided with a palace in Paris, with a princely residence in the country with an income of six hundred thousand dollars, and is to occupy the first rank among the princesses, after the future Empress. I wish ever to keep her near me as my best and most affectionate friend."

Josephine was in some degree aware of the doom which was impending, and her heart was consumed by unmitigated grief. Hortense,

The dreadful announcement.

who also was heart-stricken and world-weary, was entreated by the Emperor to prepare her mother for the sad tidings. She did so, but very imperfectly. At last the fatal hour arrived in which it was necessary for the Emperor to make the dreaded announcement to the Empress. They were both at Fontainebleau, and Hortense was with her mother. For some time there had been much constraint in the intercourse between the Emperor and Empress; he dreading to make the cruel communication, and her heart lacerated with anguish in the apprehension of receiving it.

It was the last day of November, 1809, cold and cheerless. Napoleon and Josephine dined alone in silence, not a word being spoken during the repast. At the close of the meal, Napoleon, pale and trembling, took the hand of the Empress and said:

"Josephine, my own good Josephine, you know how I have loved you. It is to you alone that I owe the few moments of happiness I have known in the world. Josephine, my destiny is stronger than my will. My dearest affections must yield to the welfare of France."

All-expected as the blow was, it was none the less dreadful. Josephine fell, apparently

Anguish of the Imperial family.

lifeless, to the floor. The Count de Beaumont was immediately summoned, and, with the aid of Napoleon, conveyed Josephine to her apartment. Hortense came at once to her mother, whom she loved so tenderly. The anguish of the scene overcame her. In respectful, though reproachful tones, she said to the Emperor, "My mother will descend from the throne, as she ascended it, in obedience to your will. Her children, content to renounce grandeurs which have not made them happy, will gladly go and devote their lives to comforting the best and the most affectionate of mothers."

Napoleon was entirely overcome. He sat down and wept bitterly. Raising his eyes swimming in tears to his daughter, he said:

"Do not leave me, Hortense. Stay by me with Eugene. Help me to console your mother and render her calm, resigned, and even happy in remaining my friend, while she ceases to be my wife."

Eugene was summoned from Italy. Upon his arrival his sister threw herself into his arms, and, after a brief interview of mutual anguish, led him to their beloved mother. After a short interview with her, he repaired to the cabinet of the Emperor. In respectful terms, but firm

Noble conduct of Eugene.

and very sad, he inquired if Napoleon intended to obtain a divorce from the Empress. Napoleon, who tenderly loved his noble son, could only reply with the pressure of the hand. Eugene immediately recoiled and, withdrawing his hand, said:

"In that case, Sire, permit me to retire from your service."

"How," exclaimed Napoleon, looking sadly upon him. "Will you, my adopted son, forsake me?"

"Yes, Sire," Eugene replied. "The son of her who is no longer Empress, can not remain viceroy. I will follow my mother into her retreat. She must now find her consolation in her children."

Tears filled the eyes of the Emperor. "You know," said he, "the stern necessity which compels this measure. Will you forsake me? Who then, should I have a son, the object of my desires and preserver of my interests, who will watch over the child when I am absent? If I die, who will prove to him a father? Who will bring him up? Who is to make a man of him?"

Napoleon and Eugene then retired to the garden, and for a long time walked, arm in arm,

The divorce.

up and down one of its avenues, engaged in earnest conversation. Josephine, with a mother's love, could not forget the interests of her children, even in her own anguish.

"The Emperor," she said to Eugene, "is your benefactor, your more than father; to whom you are indebted for every thing, and to whom therefore you owe boundless obedience."

A fortnight passed away and the 15th of December arrived; the day appointed for the consummation of this cruel sacrifice. The affecting scene transpired in the grand saloon of the palace of the Tuileries. All the members of the imperial family were present. Eugene and Hortense were with their mother, sustaining her with their sympathy and love. An extreme pallor overspread the countenance of Napoleon, as he addressed the assembled dignitaries of the empire.

"The political interests of my monarchy," said he, "and the wishes of my people, which have constantly guided my actions, require that I should transmit to an heir, inheriting my love for the people, the throne on which Providence has placed me. For many years I have lost all hope of having children by my beloved spouse the Empress Josephine. It is this con-

The scene of the divorce.

sideration which induces me to sacrifice the dearest affections of my heart, to consult only the good of my subjects, and to desire the dissolution of our marriage. Arrived at the age of forty years, I may indulge the reasonable hope of living long enough to rear, in the spirit of my own thoughts and disposition, the children with which it may please Providence to bless me. God knows how much such a determination has cost my heart. But there is no sacrifice too great for my courage when it is proved to be for the interest of France. Far from having any cause of complaint, I have nothing to say but in praise of the attachment and tenderness of my beloved wife. She has embellished fifteen years of my life, and the remembrance of them will be forever engraven on my heart. She was crowned by my hand. She shall always retain the rank and title of Empress. Above all, let her never doubt my affection, or regard me but as her best and dearest friend."

Josephine now endeavored to fulfill her part in this sad drama. Unfolding a paper, she vainly strove to read her assent to the divorce. But tears blinded her eyes and emotion choked her voice. Handing the paper to a friend and