

FICTION

Cyrus Townsend Brady

The Eagle of the Empire

A PUBLIC DOMAIN BOOK

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FICTION



The Little Countess takes Arms for Her Defence.
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THE EAGLE OF THE EMPIRE

A STORY OF WATERLOO

By CYRUS TOWNSEND BRADY

AUTHOR OF

**"The Island of Regeneration," "The Island of the Stairs,"
"Britton of the Seventh," Etc.**

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DEDICATION

Dedications have gone out of vogue save with the old fashioned. The ancient idea of an appeal to a patron has been eliminated from modern literature. If a man now inscribes a book to any one it is that he may associate with his work the names of friends he loves and delights to honor. There is always a certain amount of assurance in any such dedication, the assurance lying in the assumption that there is honor to the recipient in the association with the book. Well, there is no mistaking the purpose anyway.

One of my best friends, and that friendship has been proved in war and peace, at home and abroad, is a Bank! The Bank is like Mercy in more ways than one, but particularly in that it is twice blessed; it is blessed in what it receives, I hope, and in what it gives, I know. From the standpoint of the depositor sometimes it is better to receive than to give. It has been so in my case and I have been able to persuade the Bank to that way of thinking.

Therefore, in grateful acknowledgment of the very present help it has been to me in time of need and in public recognition of many courtesies from its officers and directors, and as some evidence of my deep appreciation of its many kindnesses to me, I dedicate this book to

**THE MOUNT VERNON TRUST COMPANY
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PREFACE

The Battle of Waterloo, which was fought just one hundred years ago and with which the story in this book ends, is popularly regarded as one of the decisive battles of the world, particularly with reference to the career of the greatest of all Captains. Personally some study has led me to believe that Bautzen was really the decisive battle of the Napoleonic wars. If the Emperor had there won the overwhelming victory to which his combinations and the fortunes of war entitled him he would still have retained his Empire. Whether he would have been satisfied or not is another question; and anyway as I am practically alone among students and critics in my opinions about Bautzen they can be dismissed. And that he lost that battle was his own fault anyway!

However Napoleon's genius cannot be denied any more than his failure. In this book I have sought to show him at his best and also almost at his worst. For sheer brilliance, military and mental, the campaigning in France in 1814 could not be surpassed. He is there with his raw recruits, his beardless boys, his old guard, his tactical and strategical ability, his furious energy, his headlong celerity and his marvelous power of inspiration; just as he was in Italy when he revolutionized the art of war and electrified the world. Many of these qualities are in evidence in the days before Waterloo, but during the actual battle upon which his fate and the fate of the world turned, the tired, broken, ill man is drowsily nodding before a farmhouse by the road, while Ney, whose superb and headlong courage was not accompanied by any corresponding military ability, wrecks the last grand army.

And there is no more dramatic an incident in all history, I believe, than Napoleon's advance on the Fifth-of-the-line drawn up on the Grenoble Road on the return from Elba.

Nor do the Roman Eagles themselves seem to have made such romantic appeal or to have won such undying devotion as the Eagles of the Empire.

This story was written just before the outbreak of the present European war and is published while it is in full course. Modern commanders wield forces beside which even the great Army of the Nations that invaded Russia is scarcely more than a detachment, and battles last for days, weeks, even months--Waterloo was decided in an afternoon!--yet war is the same. If there be any difference it simply grows more horrible. The old principles, however, are unchanged, and over the fields upon which Napoleon marched and fought, armies are marching and fighting in practically the same way to-day. And great Captains are still studying Frederick, Wellington and Bonaparte as they have ever done.

The author modestly hopes that this book may not only entertain by the love story, the tragic yet happily ended romance within its pages--for there is romance here aside from the great Captain and his exploits--but that in a small way it may serve to set forth not so much the brilliance and splendor and glory of war as the horror of it.

We are frightfully fascinated by war, even the most peaceable and peace-loving of us. May this story help to convey to the reader some of the other side of it; the hunger, the cold, the weariness, the suffering, the disaster, the despair of the soldier; as well as the love and the joy and the final happiness of the beautiful Laure and the brave Marteau to say nothing of redoubtable old Bal-Arret, the Bullet-Stopper--whose fates were determined on the battlefield amid the clash of arms.

CYRUS TOWNSEND BRADY.

THE HEMLOCKS,
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PROLOGUE

VIVE L'EMPEREUR

The weatherworn Chateau d'Aumenier stands in the midst of a noble park of trees forming part of an extensive domain not far to the northwest of the little town of Sezanne, in the once famous county of Champagne, in France. The principal room of the castle is a great hall in the oldest part of the venerable pile which dates back for eight hundred years, or to the tenth century and the times of the famous Count Eudes himself, for whom it was held by one of his greatest vassals.

The vast apartment is filled with rare and interesting mementos of its distinguished owners, including spoils of war

and trophies of the chase, acquired in one way or another in the long course of their history, and bespeaking the courage, the power, the ruthlessness, and, sometimes, the unscrupulousness of the hard-hearted, heavy-handed line. Every country in Europe and every age, apparently, has been levied upon to adorn this great hall, with its long mullioned windows, its enormous fireplace, its huge carved stone mantel, its dark oak paneled walls and beamed ceiling. But, the most interesting, the most precious of all the wonderful things therein has a place of honor to itself at the end farthest from the main entrance.

Fixed against this wall is a broken staff, or pole, surmounted by a small metallic figure. The staff is fastened to the wall by clamps of tempered steel which are further secured by delicate locks of skillful and intricate workmanship. The pole is topped by the gilded effigy of an eagle.

In dimensions the eagle is eight inches high, from head to feet, and nine and a half inches wide, from wing tip to wing tip. Heraldically, "*Un Aigle Eploye*" it would be called. That is, an eagle in the act of taking flight--in the vernacular, a "spread eagle." The eagle looks to the left, with its wings half expanded. In its talons it grasps a thunderbolt, as in the old Roman standard. Those who have ever wandered into the Monastery of the Certosa, at Milan, have seen just such an eagle on one of the tombs of the great Visconti family. For, in truth, this emblem has been modeled after that one.

Below the thunderbolt is a tablet of brass, three inches square, on which is a raised number. In this instance, the number is five. The copper of which the eagle is molded was originally gilded, but in its present battered condition much of the gilt has been worn off, or shot off, and the original material is plainly discernible. If it could be lifted its weight would be found to be about three and a half pounds.

Around the neck of the eagle hangs a wreath of pure gold. There is an inscription on the back of it, which says that the wreath was presented to the regiment by the loyal city of Paris after the wonderful Ulm campaign.

One of the claws of the eagle has been shot away. The gold laurel wreath has also been struck by a bullet, and some of its leaves are gone. The tip of one wing is missing. The head of the eagle, originally proudly and defiantly erect, has been bent backward so that, instead of a level glance, it looks upward, and there is a deep dent in it, as from a blow. And right in the breast gapes a great ragged shot-hole, which pierces the heart of the proud emblem. The eagle has seen service. It has been in action. It bears its honorable wounds. No attempt has been made to repair it.

The staff on which the eagle stands has been broken at about half its length, presumably by a bullet. The shattered, splintered end indicates that the staff is made of oak. It had been painted blue originally. The freshness of the paint has been marred. On one side, a huge slice has been cut out of it as if by a mighty sword stroke. The tough wood is gashed and scarred in various places, and there is a long, dark blur just above the broken part, which looks as if it might be a blood stain.

Below the eagle, and attached to the remainder of the staff for about three-fourths of its length, is what remains of a battle flag. The material of it was originally rich and heavy crimson silk, bordered with gold fringe. It is faded, tattered, shot-torn, bullet-ridden, wind-whipped; parts of it have disappeared. It has been carefully mounted, and is stretched out so as to present its face to the beholder. In dull, defaced letters of gold may be read inscriptions--the imagination piecing out the missing parts. Here is a line that runs as follows:

***Napoleon, Empereur des Francais, au 5e Infanterie
de la Ligne.***

And underneath, in smaller and brighter letters, as if a later addition:

Grenadiers du Garde Imperiale.

There has been some sort of device in the middle, but most of it has disappeared. From what remains, one guesses that it was a facsimile of the eagle on the staff-head. There are little tarnished spots of gold here and there. A close observation discloses that they are golden bees. In the corners near the staff, the only ones that are left are golden wreaths in the center of which may be seen the letter "N".

On the other side of the flag, hidden from the beholder, are a series of names. They have been transcribed upon a silver plate, which is affixed to the wall below the broken staff. They read as follows:

"Marengo; Ulm; Austerlitz; Jena; Berlin; Eylau; Friedland; Madrid; Eckmuhl; Wagram; Vienna; Smolensk; Moskowa; Bautzen; Leipsic; Montmirail; Arcis."

Beneath this list is a heavy dash and below all in larger letters, which unlike the rest have been filled with black enamel, is the last word,

"WATERLOO."

The eagle, the staff, and the flag are enclosed and protected from careless handling by a heavy glass case, the panes set in steel and silver, and the doors carefully locked to prevent its being stolen away. But its security is not entrusted to these inanimate materials alone. Every hour of the day and night there keeps watch over it an old soldier. He is armed and equipped as if for battle, in the uniform of the old Fifth Regiment of the Line, somehow temporarily incorporated in the Imperial Guard as a supplementary regiment of the Grenadiers thereof. The black gaiters, the white trousers, the blue and scarlet coat, with its crossed belts and brilliant decorations, the lofty bearskin head-dress, are all strangely in keeping with the relic and its surroundings.

Sometimes the soldier--and there are five of them whose sole and only business it is to watch over the flag--paces steadily up and down in front of it, like a sentry on his post. Sometimes he stands before it at parade rest. As to each individual's movements, he suits his fancy. These are old soldiers, indeed, highly privileged, veterans of twenty campaigns, fifty pitched battles, and smaller affairs without number. Their weatherbeaten faces are lined and wrinkled, their mustaches are as white as snow.

The guard is always relieved at the appointed intervals with military formality and precision. One soldier, older, taller than the rest, is in command of the other four. From his buttonhole dangles from a white ribbon a little cross of white enamel. Though he shows no insignia of rank higher than that of a Sergeant of the Guard, he has won the proud distinction of the Legion of Honor.

At one stated hour in the day, a tall, handsome, distinguished, middle-aged man, wearing for the occasion the uniform of a colonel in the Imperial Guard, a blood-stained, tarnished, battered, battle-worn uniform, be it observed, comes into the room. He is more often than not attended by a lovely lady of beauty and grace, in spite of her years, who leads with either hand a handsome youth and a beautiful maiden. The four soldiers are always present in full uniform under the command of their sergeant at this hour. As the officer enters they form line, come to attention, and present arms, a salute he gravely and punctiliously acknowledges. Attendants follow, bearing decanters and glasses; wine for the officer and his family, something stronger for the soldiers. The glasses are filled. With her own fair hands, the lady hands them to the men. When all are ready the officer holds up his glass. The men, stacking arms, do the same. The eyes of all glance upward. Above the eagle and the flag upon a shelf upon the wall stands a marble head, product of Canova's marvelous chisel. It is Napoleon. White it gleams against the dark stone of the old hall. At a nod the soldiers face about, and----

"*Vive l'Empereur*," says the officer quietly.

"*Vive l'Empereur*," in deep and solemn tones repeats the old sergeant.

"*Vive l'Empereur*," comes from the lips of the four soldiers, and even the woman and the young people join in that ancient acclaim.

The great Emperor is dead long since. He sleeps beneath the willows in the low valley in the lonely, far-off, wave-washed islet of St. Helena. But to these men he will never die. It is their blood that is upon that eagle staff. It was in their hands that it received those wounds. While they carried it, flung to the breeze of battle, it was shot-torn and storm-riven. It is a priceless treasure to them all. As they followed it with the ardor and devotion of youth so they now guard it and respect it with the steadier but not less intense consecration of maturity and old age.

The eagle of a vanished empire, the emblem of a fame that is past. It is as real to them as when into the hands of one of them it was given by the Emperor himself on the Champ de Mars so long ago when he was lord of the world. And so long as they live they will love it, reverence it, guard it, salute it as in the past.

BOOK I

THE EMPEROR AT BAY

CHAPTER I

BEARERS OF EVIL TIDINGS

The Emperor walked nervously up and down the long, low-ceiled apartment, the common room of the public inn at Nogent. Grouped around a long table in the center of the room several secretaries were busy with orders, reports and dispatches. At one end stood a group of officers of high rank in rich uniforms whose brilliance was shrouded by heavy cloaks falling from their shoulders and gathered about them, for the air was raw and chill, despite a great fire burning in a huge open fireplace. Their cloaks and hats were wet, their boots and trousers splashed with mud, and in general they were travel-stained and weary. They eyed the Emperor, passing and repassing, in gloomy silence mixed with awe. In their bearing no less than in their faces was expressed a certain unwonted fierce resentment, which flamed up and became more evident when the Emperor turned his back in his short, restless march to and fro, but which subsided as suddenly when he had them under observation. By the door was stationed a young officer in the uniform of the Fifth Regiment of the infantry of the line. He stood quietly at attention, and was evidently there on duty.

From time to time officers, orderlies and couriers came into the room, bearing dispatches. These were handed to the young officer and by him passed over to the Emperor. Never since the days of Job had any man perhaps been compelled to welcome such a succession of bearers of evil tidings as Napoleon on that winter night.

The Emperor's face was pale always, but there was an ashy grayness about his pallor in that hour that marked a difference. His face was lined and seamed, not to say haggard. The mask of imperturbability he usually wore was down. He looked old, tired, discouraged. His usual iron self-control and calm had given place to an overwhelming nervousness and incertitude. He waved his hands, he muttered to himself, his mouth twitched awry from time to time as he walked.

"Well, messieurs," he began at last, in sharp, rather high-pitched notes--even his voice sounded differently--as he lifted his eyes from perusing the latest dispatch and faced the uneasy group by the fireplace, "you are doubtless anxious to know the news." The Emperor stepped over to the table as he spoke, and gathered up a handful of dispatches and ran over them with his hands. "It is all set forth here: The Germans and the English have shut up Carnot in Antwerp," he continued rapidly, throwing one paper down. "The Bourbons have entered Brussels,"--he threw another letter upon the table--"Belgium, you see, is lost. Bernadotte has taken Denmark. Macdonald is falling back on Epemay, his weak force growing weaker every hour. Yorck, who failed us once before, is hard on his heels with twice, thrice, the number of his men. Sacken is trying to head him off. The King of Naples seeks to save the throne on which I established him by withdrawing from me now--the poor fool! The way to Paris along the Marne is open, and Blucher is marching on the capital with eighty thousand Russians, Prussians and Bavarians. Schwarzenburg with many more is close at hand."

Something like a hollow groan broke from the breasts of the auditors as the fateful dispatches fell one by one from the Emperor's hand. The secretaries stopped writing and stared. The young officer by the door clenched his hands.

"Sire----," said one of the officers, the rich trappings of whose dress indicated that he was a Marshal of France. He began boldly but ended timidly. "Before it is too late----"

Napoleon swung around and fixed his piercing eyes upon him, as his voice died away. The Emperor could easily finish the uncompleted sentence.

"What, you, Mortier!" he exclaimed.

"I, too, Sire," said another marshal more boldly, apparently encouraged by the fact that his brother officer had broken the ice.

"And you, Marmont," cried the Emperor, transfixing him in turn with a reproachful glance.

Both marshals stepped back abashed.

"Besides," said the Emperor gloomily, "it is already too late. I have reserved the best for the last," he said with grim irony. "The courier who has just departed is from Caulaincourt." He lifted the last dispatch, which he had torn open a moment or two since. He shook it in the air, crushed it in his hand, laughed, and those who heard him laugh shuddered.

"What does the Duke of Vicenza say, Sire?" chimed in another marshal.

"It is you, Berthier," said the Emperor. "You, at least, do not advise surrender?"

"Not yet, Sire."

"But when?" asked Napoleon quickly. Without waiting for an answer to his question, he continued: "The allies now graciously offer us--think of it, gentlemen--the limits of 1791."

"Impossible!" cried a big red-headed marshal.

"They demand it, Prince of the Moskowa," answered the Emperor, addressing Marshal Ney.

"But it's incredible, Sire."

"What!" burst out Napoleon passionately. "Shall we leave France less than we found her, after all these victories, after all these conquests, after all these submissions of kings and nations? Shall we go back to the limits of the old monarchy? Never!"

"But, Sire----" began Marshal Maret.

"No more," said the Emperor, turning upon the Duc de Bassano. "Rather death than that. While we have arms we can at least die."

He flashed an imperious look upon the assembly, but no one seemed to respond to his appeal. The Emperor's glance slowly roved about the room. The young captain met his look. Instantly and instinctively his hand went up in salute, his lips framed the familiar phrase:

"*Vive l'Empereur!* Yes, Sire, we can still die for you," he added in a low respectful voice, but with tremendous emphasis nevertheless.

He was a mere youth, apparently. Napoleon looked at him approvingly, although some of the marshals, with clouded brows and indignant words of protest at such an outburst from so young a man, would have reproved him had not their great leader checked them with a gesture.

"Your name, sir," he said shortly to the young officer who had been guilty of such an amazing breach of military decorum.

"Marteau, Sire. Jean Marteau, at the Emperor's service," answered the young soldier nervously, realizing what impropriety he had committed.

"It remains," said the Emperor, looking back at the marshals and their aides, "for a beardless boy to set an example of devotion in which Princes and Dukes of the Empire, Marshals of France, heroes of fifty pitched battles, fail."

"We will die for you, Sire, for France, die with arms in our hands, if we had them, and on the field of battle," began impetuous Ney.

"If we don't starve first, Sire," said cautious Berthier gloomily.

"Starve!" exclaimed the Emperor.

"The army is without food," said Marmont bluntly.

"It is half naked and freezing," added Victor.

"Ammunition fails us," joined in Oudinot.

"We have no arms," added Mortier.

"Do you, then, advise that we abandon ourselves to the tender mercies of the allies?" asked Napoleon bitterly.

"Messieurs, it is surely better to die hungry and naked and without arms for the Emperor than to consent to his dishonor, which is the dishonor of France," suddenly burst forth the young man at the door.

"How dare you," thundered the usually cool and collected Berthier angrily, "a mere boy, monsieur, assume to speak in the presence of the Emperor, to say nothing of these great captains?"

"May my life be forfeit, *Monsieur le Duc*," said the young soldier more boldly, since Napoleon had condoned his first remark, "if I have done wrong in assuring my Emperor that we would still die for him."

"Of what regiment are you?" said Napoleon, waving Berthier of the frowning face into silence.

"I belong to the fifth of the line, Sire."

"He is in my corps, Sire," said Ney. "I have brigaded that veteran regiment with the new recruits of the Young Guard."

"But I have seen service before," said the young captain.

"And I have seen you before," said Napoleon, fixing upon him a penetrating glance.

"Yes, Sire, at the end of the bridge over the Elster at Leipsic. You were watching the men streaming across when the bridge was blown up. I was among the last to cross the bridge."

"Go on," said the Emperor, as the young man paused.

"Your majesty was pleased to say----"

"I recall it all now. I saw you plunge into the river and bring back to shore an Eagle--that of your regiment. You fell at my feet. You should have had the Legion of Honor for it. I promised it to you, did I not?"

"Yes, Sire."

"Why did you not claim it?"

"I was wounded and left for dead; when I got back to France and my regiment I could not add to your anxiety by--"

"Here," said the Emperor, "I still have power to reward faithful servants and bold spirits." He took off his own cross, fastened it on the heaving breast of the amazed young soldier. "Prince," continued the Emperor, turning to Ney.

"Sire?"

"Spare me this young man. I need him on my staff."

"I can ill spare any officer from my weak corps of boys and old men, much less a veteran," the marshal laughed. "One campaign makes us veterans, it seems, nowadays, but you shall have him."

"Berthier," continued Napoleon, "make out the transfer. Give the young man a step up. Let him be Major."

"Very well, Sire," said Berthier, turning to one of the secretaries and giving him directions.

"Meanwhile, what's to be done?" continued Napoleon.

"Tell Caulaincourt to agree to anything," said Maret bluntly.

"I yet live," said Napoleon proudly. "Naked, starving, unarmed, though we may be, I and my soldiers have not forgot our trade. Courage, messieurs. All is not yet lost while your Emperor breathes. Here at Nogent, at Montereau and farther back we still have seventy thousand men. With seventy thousand men and Napoleon much may be accomplished. Blucher, it is true, marches on Paris. He counts on the army of Schwarzenberg to contain us. He marches leisurely, with wide intervals between his divisions. What shall prevent us----"

"Your majesty," cried Marmont, his eyes flashing as he divined the Emperor's plan.

He was the quickest witted and most brilliant of the marshals, but by no means the hardest fighter, or the most loyal and devoted subordinate.

"I am worn out," said the Emperor, smiling more kindly upon them. "I have scarcely been out of the saddle—I have scarcely had an hour of sleep since the bloody day of La Rothiere. I must have rest. Let none disturb me for two hours. Hold the messenger from the Duke of Vicenza. I will give an answer then."

The Emperor drooped, as he spoke, much of the animation went out of his face and figure. He looked grayer than ever, heavier than ever, older than ever.

"In two hours awaken me," he said.

He stepped toward the door that led to the room reserved for himself, but before he reached it two officers were admitted. Napoleon stopped and looked at them. They saluted him, walked over to Berthier, the Chief of Staff.

"The soldiers are dying of hunger," said the first. "The Commissary General has nothing to give them. He expected a convoy of provisions, but Cossacks, who are reported at Fontainebleau, have captured the train. What shall we do?"

Berthier threw up his hands, and turned to the other officer to hear his report.

"Ten thousand men are without arms, or with arms unserviceable and broken. The supply of powder is low. Where shall we get any more?"

The silence in the room was terrible.

"Sire," said Berthier in a low voice, turning to Napoleon, standing staring, "you hear?" He stretched out his hand in appealing gesture.

The Emperor turned on his heel, without deigning to look or speak.

"Watch the door for two hours," he said to the young officer, crashing to the door behind him. "Awaken me then."

"Gentlemen," said Berthier despairingly to the other officers, "we shall never persuade him. You had better repair to your commands. Some of you must have something to eat. Divide what you have with the less fortunate divisions. Arm and equip the best men. There is a small supply at Nogent, I am told. The others must wait."

"If we could only get at these pigs of Prussians, these dogs of Russians," said Ney, "we could take food and guns and powder from them."

"Doubtless," said Berthier, not caring to argue that point.

He bowed to the officers, as they saluted, and went out of the door muttering and arguing noisily and insubordinately, it must be admitted, and then turned to the table where the secretaries sat. One of them had laid his head down on his arms, stretched out on the table and was fast asleep. The marshal awoke him and dismissed him with most of the rest. From another Berthier took a paper. He examined it, signed it, sealed it, and handed it to the young officer on guard at the door.

"Your commission, monsieur," he said. "Once I was young and full of enthusiasm and hope and determination. It is well for France that some of her children still retain those things."

"I thank the Prince de Wagram," said the young officer, bowing low, "and I beg his pardon for having spoken."

"The Emperor has forgiven," said Berthier indifferently. "His absolution covers us all. At least if I fall behind you in those other qualities of youth I shall not fall behind you in devotion. Come, Maret," continued the grand marshal.

The two worthies turned away and went out. The long room sank into silence. A soldier came in after a while and replenished the fire, saluted and passed out. The pen of the busy secretary, the only one left of the group, ceased scratching on the paper. He, too, sank back in his chair asleep. The short day faded into twilight and then into darkness. From outside beyond the courtyard of the inn came confused noises, indicating moving bodies of men, the rumble of artillery, the clatter of cavalry, faint words of command. A light snow began to fall. It was intensely raw and cold. The officer picked up his cloak, wrapped it around him, and resumed his immobile guard.

CHAPTER II

THE EMPEROR DREAMS

Within a mean room, which had hastily been prepared for his use, upon a camp bed, having cast himself down, fully clothed as he was, lay the worn-out, dispirited, embittered Emperor. He sought sleep in vain. Since Leipsic, with its horrible disaster a few months before, one reverse of fortune had succeeded another. He who had entered every country a conqueror at the head of his armies, whose myriads of soldiers had overrun every land, eating it up with ruthless greed and rapacity, and spreading destruction far and wide, was now at bay. He who had dictated terms of peace in all the capitals of Europe at the head of triumphant legions was now with a small, weak, ill-equipped, un-fed army, striving to protect his own capital. France was receiving the pitiless treatment which she had accorded other lands. With what measure she had meted out, it was being measured back to her again. The cup of trembling, filled with bitterness, was being held to her shrinking lips, and she must perforce drain it to the dregs. After all Napoleon's far-flung campaigns, after all his overwhelming victories, after the vast outpouring of blood and treasure, after all his glory and all his fame, the end was at hand.

The prostrate Emperor stared out through the low window into the gray sky with its drift of snow across the panes. He heard faintly the tumult outside. Disaster, ruin, despair entered his heart. The young conscripts were disheartened by defeat, the steady old veterans were pitifully few in number, thousands of them were in foreign prisons, many more thousands of them were dead. Disease was rife among the youthful recruits, unused to such hard campaigning, as he had summoned to the colors. Without food and without arms, they were beginning to desert their Eagles. The spirit of the marshals and great officers whom he had raised from the dust to affluence and power was waning. They were worn out with much fighting. They wanted peace, almost at any price. He remembered their eager questions when he had joined the army a month ago.

"What reinforcements has your majesty brought?"

"None," he had been compelled to answer.

"What, then, shall we do?" queried one after the other.

"We must try fortune with what we have," he had declared undauntedly.

Well, they had tried fortune. Brienne, where he had been a boy at school, had been the scene of a brilliantly successful action. They had lost no glory at La Rothiere afterward--although they gained nothing else--where with thirty thousand men he had beaten back through one long bloody day and night thrice that number, only to have to retreat in the end for the salvation of those who had been left alive. And, to him who had been wont to spend them so indifferently, men had suddenly become precious, since he could get no more. Every dead or wounded man was now unreplaceable, and each loss made his problem harder to solve. Since those two first battles he had been forced back, step by step, mile by mile, league by league, everywhere; and all his lieutenants likewise. Now Schwarzenberg, with one hundred and thirty thousand men, confronted him on the Seine and the Aube, and Blucher, with eighty thousand men, was marching on Paris by way of the Marne, with only Macdonald and his beaten and dispirited men, not ten thousand in number, to hold the fiery old Prussian field marshal in check.

"How had it all come to this, and why?" the man asked himself, and, with all his greatness and clearness of vision, the reason did not occur to him. For he had only himself to blame for his misfortunes. He was not the man that he had been. For a moment his old spirit had flashed out in the common room of the inn two hours before, but the reaction left him heavy, weary, old, lonely. Physically, he felt unequal to the strain. His human frame was almost worn out. Mere men cannot long usurp the attributes of God. Intoxicated with success, he had grasped at omnipotence, and for a time had seemed to enjoy it, only to fail. The mills of the gods do grind slowly, but they do grind immeasurably small in the end.

What a long, bloody way he had traversed since Toulon, since Arcola, since the bridge at Lodi, since Marengo? Into what far-off lands it had led him: Italy, Egypt, Syria, Spain, Austria, Prussia and the great, white, cold empire of the North. And all the long way paved with corpses--corpses he had regarded with indifference until to-day.

It was cold in the room, in spite of the fire in the stove. It reminded him of that dreadful retreat. The Emperor

covered his face with his hand. No one was there. He could afford to give away. There rose before him in the darkness the face of the wife of his youth, only to be displaced by the nearer woman, the Austrian wife and the little son whom he had so touchingly confided to the National Guard a month ago when he left Paris for the last try with fortune for his empire and his life. Would the allies at last and finally beat him; would Francis Joseph, weak monarch whom he hated, take back his daughter, and with her Napoleon's son, and bring him up in Austria to hate the name of France and his father? The Emperor groaned aloud.

The darkness fell upon the world outside, upon the room within, upon the soul of the great Captain approaching the nadir of his fortunes, his spirit almost at the breaking point. To him at last came Berthier and Maret. They had the right of entrance. The time for which he had asked had passed. Young Marteau admitted them without question. They entered the room slowly, not relishing their task, yet resolute to discharge their errand. The greater room outside was alight from fire and from lanterns. Enough illumination came through the door into the bed-chamber for their purpose--more than enough for the Emperor. He turned his head away, lest they should see what they should see. The two marshals bowed and stood silent.

"Well?" said the Emperor at last, his voice unduly harsh, as if to cover emotion with its roughness, and they noticed that he did not look at them.

"Sire, the courier of the Duke of Vicenza waits for his answer," said Maret.

There was another long pause.

"Will not your majesty give way for the good of the people?" urged Berthier. "Give peace to France, sire. The army is hungry----"

"Am I God, messieurs, to feed thousands with a few loaves and fishes?" cried the Emperor bitterly.

"No, Sire. Therefore, authorize the duke to sign the treaty, and----"

"What!" said Napoleon fiercely, sitting up on the bed and facing them. "You would have me sign a treaty like that? Trample under foot my coronation oath? Unheard-of disaster may have snatched from me the promise to renounce my own conquests, but give up those before me, never! Leave France smaller, weaker than I found her! God keep me from such a disgrace. Reply to Caulaincourt, since you wish it, but tell him I reject this treaty. We must have better terms. I prefer to run the uttermost risks of war."

Berthier opened his mouth to speak again, but Napoleon silenced him with word and gesture.

"No more," he said. "Go."

The two marshals bowed and left the room with downcast heads and resentful hearts. As they disappeared Napoleon called after them.

"Send me that boy at the door. Lights," he cried, as the young officer, not waiting for the order to be repeated, promptly entered the inner room and saluted. "The maps on the table, bring them here, and the table, too," commanded the Emperor.

Even as the lights which were placed on the table dispelled the dusk of the room, so something had dispelled the gloom of the great man's soul. For a moment he looked almost young again. The gray pallor left his cheeks. Fire sparkled in his eyes.

"Not yet--not yet," he muttered, spreading the maps upon the table. "We will have one more try with fortune. My star is low on the horizon, but it has not set yet."

"Nor shall it set, Sire, while I and my comrades live," returned Marteau.

"You are right," said the Emperor. "You stand to me for France. Your spirit typifies the spirit of my soldiery, does it not?"

"Theirs is even greater than mine, Sire," was the prompt answer.

"That's well. Do you know the country hereabouts?"

"I was born at Aumenier."

"Let me see," said the Emperor, "the village lies beyond Sezanne?"

"Yes, Sire."

"In an opening in the great woods beyond the marshes of St. Gond," continued the other, studying the map, "there is a chateau there. Are you by any chance of the ancient house of Aumenier?"

"My father was a warden on the estates of the last marquis."

"Good. Do you know that country?"

"I have hunted over every rod of it as a boy, Sire."

"I must have news," said the Emperor, "information, definite tidings. I want to know where Blucher is; where his several army corps are. Can I trust so young a head as yours with great matters?"

"Tortures could not wring from me anything you may confide, your majesty," said the young man resolutely.

"I believe you," said the Emperor, looking at him keenly and reading him like a book. "Look. Before daybreak Marmont marches to Sezanne. The next day after I follow. I shall leave enough men behind the river here to hold back Schwarzenberg, or at least to check him if he advances. With the rest I shall fall on Blucher."

The young man's eyes sparkled. He had been bending over the map. He drew himself up and saluted.

"It is the Emperor at his best," he said.

"You have studied the art of war, young sir?"

"I have read every one of your majesty's campaigns."

"And you see what I would do?"

"Not altogether, but----"

"Fall upon the flank of the unsuspecting Prussian, burst through his line, break his center, turn to the right or left, beat him in detail, drive him back, relieve Paris, and then----"

"And then, Sire?"

"Come back and do the same thing with Schwarzenberg!"

"Your majesty!" cried the young soldier, as the whole mighty plan was made clear to him.

"Ha! It brightens your eyes and flushes your cheek, does it not? So it will brighten the eyes and flush the cheeks of France. I will show them. In six weeks I will drive them across the Rhine. In another month they shall sue for peace and the Vistula shall be our boundary."

"What does your majesty desire of me?"

"That you go at once. Take with you whomsoever you will. Bring or send me reports. You are educated?"

"I was a student at your majesty's Military College," answered the young man.

"Did you finish there?"

"I finished in your majesty's army last year."

"How old are you?"

"Twenty-two, Sire."

"You belong to the foot, but you can ride?"

"Anything."

"Marshal Berthier will give you horses. I shall be at Sezanne the day after to-morrow night. You will have news for me then?"

"Or be dead, Sire."

"I have no use for dead men. Don't get yourself taken. Any fool can die, or be made prisoner. It is a wise man who can live for me and France."

"I shall live," said the young man simply. "Have you any further command, Sire?"

"None."

The hand of Marteau was raised in salute.

"Stop," said the Emperor, as the soldier turned to the door.

"Sire?"

"Come back with news, and let us but escape from this tightening coil, and you shall be a lieutenant colonel in my guard."

"I will do it for love of your majesty alone," cried the soldier, turning away.

It was not nearly dawn before Berthier and Maret, who had been pondering over the dispatch to Caulaincourt, who was fighting the envoys of the allies at the Congress at Chatillon, ventured to intrude upon the Emperor. Having come to his decision, as announced to the young soldier, who had got his horses and his comrade and gone, the Emperor, with that supreme command of himself which few men possessed, had at last got a few hours of rest. He had dressed himself with the assistance of his faithful valet, Constant, who had given him a bath and shaved him, and he now confronted the two astonished marshals with an air serene—even cheerful.

"Dispatches!" he said, as they approached him. "It is a question of a very different matter. Tell Caulaincourt to prolong the negotiations, but to concede nothing, to commit me to nothing. I am going to beat Blucher. If I succeed, the state of affairs will entirely change, and we shall see what we shall see. Tell Marmont to give orders for his corps to march immediately after they get some breakfast. No, they may not wait till morning. Fortune has given the Prussians into my hands. Write to my brother in Paris; tell him that he may expect news from us of the most important character in forty-eight hours. Let the Parisians continue their misereres and their forty-hour-long prayers for the present. We'll soon give them something else to think of."

"But, Sire----" feebly interposed Berthier.

"Do as I tell you," said the Emperor, good-humoredly, "and leave the rest to me." He was in a mood apparently that nothing could dash that morning. "And you will be as much surprised as the Prussians, and I believe that nobody can be more amazed than they will be."

CHAPTER III

THE ARMY MARCHES AWAY

Gallantly on his errand rode young Marteau. Napoleon's order to Berthier, by him transmitted down the line, had secured four of the best horses in the army for his messengers. For young Marteau went not alone. With him rode a tall grenadier of the Imperial Guard, whose original name had been lost, or forgot, in a sobriquet which fitted him perfectly, and which he had richly earned in a long career as a soldier. They called him "Bullet Stopper," "Balle-Arretante," the curious compound ran in French, and the soldiers clipped it and condensed it into "Bal-Arret!" He used to boast that he had been wounded in every country in Europe and in Asia and Africa as well. He had been hit more times than any soldier high or low in the army. He had distinguished himself by valor, and, but for his humble extraction and meager education, might have risen to a high command. As it was, he was personally known to the Emperor, and was

accounted as one of the favorite soldiers of the army.

He, too, had been a dweller on the Aumenier estates. It was his tales of adventure which had kindled the martial spirit in young Marteau, whom he had known from his birth. A warm friendship subsisted between the young officer and the old soldier, which no difference in rank or station could ever impair. When the Emperor had given him leave to take with him whomsoever he would, his thoughts had at once turned to old Bullet Stopper. The latter had gladly accepted the invitation.

Behold him now, his huge body astride of an enormous horse--for, although the grenadier was a foot-soldier, he could still ride after a fashion--plodding along through the mud and the wet and the cold on the mission which, if successful, would perhaps enable Napoleon to save the army and France, to say nothing of his throne and his family.

Captain Marteau, or Major Marteau, to give him his new title, had said nothing as to the nature of his mission, upon which they had been dispatched, to the humble comrade, the faithful follower who accompanied him. He had only told him that it was difficult, dangerous, and of vital importance, and he had explained to him that his familiarity with the country, as well as a warm-hearted admiration and respect for his shrewdness and skill and courage, had caused his selection. That was enough for the old soldier; dangers, difficulties, were as the breath of life to the veteran. And he was always happy to follow Marteau, in whose career he took an interest almost fatherly.

The weather was frightful. It had snowed and then thawed. The temperature was now just above the freezing point. The rough wind was raw, the fierce winter gale was laden with wet snow. The roads, like all country cross-roads in France, or anywhere else, for that matter, in that day, were a sea of mud. It was well that the pair had brought two extra horses. By changing mounts from time to time they were enabled to spare their beasts and make the greater speed. The Emperor had impressed upon his young aide the necessity for getting the information to him at the earliest possible moment. Haste was everything. So they pressed on.

Without waiting for their report, and presuming on his general knowledge of Blucher's character and shrewdly deducing the exact state of affairs Napoleon was already acting as if he possessed absolute and accurate information. The drums were beating the long roll as they rode through the still dark streets of the little town of Nogent. Horses were being harnessed to guns, baggage wagons were being loaded, ammunition caissons were being got ready. The troops were assembling out of houses and tents, and coming from around fires, where many of them had passed an unsheltered night.

There was little of the joy, the gaiety, the *elan* of the French soldier, to be seen in the faces of the men thus summoned to the Eagles. They came, indeed, they answered the call, but with black looks and sullen faces and a manner almost despairing. They had fought and fought and fought. They had been beaten back and back and back, and when they had not been fighting they had been retreating. And always they were hungry. And always they were cold.

The enormous armies of Schwarzenberg had been extended on either side. They were constantly threatened with being outflanked. Most of them were young soldiers, weary and dispirited, and many of them unarmed. Every battle had reduced the stock of good muskets. Many of those still in possession of the troops had been ruined by their unskillful handling.

The supply of regimental officers was utterly inadequate to the demand. The bravest and the best are usually the first to fall; the boldest and most venturesome the most liable to capture. Perhaps, if the Emperor had broken up his guard and distributed the veterans among the raw troops, the effect might have been better, but in that case he would have destroyed his main reliance in his army. No, it was better to keep the guard together at all hazards. It had already been drawn heavily upon for officers for other corps.

War was popularly supposed to be a thing of dashing adventure, of victory, and plunder. It had been all that before. Experience had thrust them all unprepared face to face with the naked reality of defeat, disease, weary marches over awful roads in freezing cold, in drifting snow, or in sodden mire. They had no guns, they had little food, thank God, there was some clothing, such as it was, but even the best uniforms were not calculated to stand such strains as had been imposed upon these.

Only the old guard, staunch, stern, splendid, indomitable, a magnificent body of men, held the army together--they and the cavalry. Murat, peerless horseman, was playing the traitor to save his wretched Neapolitan throne. But Grouchy, Nansouty, Sebastiani and others remained. Conditions were bad in the cavalry, but they were not so bad as they were in the infantry. And Druot of the artillery also kept it together in the retreat. Guns, cannon, were more precious almost than men.

Now early that morning, while it was yet dark, they were called up from their broken sleep to undertake what to them was another purposeless march. Even the Eagles drooped in the hands of their bearers. The soldiers did not know, they could not see. The great high roads that led to Paris were being abandoned; they were plunging into unfathomable morasses; they were being led through dark, gloomy, dreadful woods to the northward. Where? For what purpose? The dumb, wrathful, insubordinate, despairful army indeed moved at the will of its master, but largely because it realized that it could not stay where it was, and largely because it was better to move on and die than to lie down and die. They were at least warmer on the march!

The spirit of the guard and of the subordinate officers, say from the colonels down, was good enough, but the generals and the marshals were sick of fighting. They had had enough of it. They had gained all that they could gain in their world-wide campaigns, in fame, money, titles, estates. They had everything to lose and nothing to win. They wanted rest, an opportunity to enjoy. Some of them were devoted to the Emperor, in fact, all of them were, but their own comfort and self-interest bulked larger and larger before them. They saw nothing but defeat at the end of their endeavors, and they wanted to negotiate peace with such honor as could be had while they were still a force to be reckoned with.

Their unwillingness and mutinous spirit, however, had not yet reached its highest development. That came later, and brought treachery in its train. The awful will of the Emperor still overruled them. Wrathfully, insubordinately, protestingly, they still marched when he gave the word.

The Emperor had been working with that furious concentration which he alone of all men seemed to be able to bring about, and which was one of the secrets of his power. Orders borne by couriers had streamed in all directions over the roads. Napoleon was about to undertake the most daring and marvelous campaign of his whole history. The stimulus of despair, the certainty of ruin unless the advance of the allies could be stayed, had at last awakened his dormant energies, filled his veins with the fire of youth and spring.

With that comprehensive eye which made him the master of battlefields and nations he had forseen everything. Soldiers were coming from Spain. He had given instructions to magnify their number and their strength. He shrewdly surmised that their appearance on the left flank would cause the cautious Schwarzenberg to pause, to withdraw his flankers, to mass to meet them. There would be a halt in the advance. The allies still feared the Emperor. Although much of his prestige was gone, they never made little of Napoleon. He intended to leave some of the best troops to confront Schwarzenberg between Nogent and Montereau, under Victor and Oudinot, hard fighters both, with instructions not to engage in any decisive battle, not to allow themselves to be trapped into that, but to stand on the defensive, to hold the River Seine, to retreat foot by foot, if pressed, to take advantage of every cover, to hold the enemy in check, to contest every foot of the way, to assume a strength which they did not have.

He promised that so soon as he had fallen upon Blucher he would send the news and see that it got to Schwarzenberg and the allied monarchs who were with him. Reverses which he hoped to inflict on the Prussian Field Marshal would increase the Austrian hesitation. The Emperor believed that the pressure by Oudinot and Victor would be effective. They would draw in their columns and concentrate.

After he had finished with Blucher and his army, he intended to retrace his steps and do the same thing with Schwarzenberg. Of course, if he failed with Blucher it was all over. He was the last hope of France—he and his army. If his magnificent dash at the Prussians and Russians was not successful, nothing could delay the end. Napoleon was staking all on the throw, taking the gambler's chance, taking it recklessly, accepting the hazard, but neglecting no means to insure the winning of the game.

The Emperor flung a screen of cavalry in front of Marmont, to patrol every village, to control every farmhouse, to see that no news of his advance came to the unsuspecting old Prussian. And then he himself stayed back in Nogent to see his own orders carried out. He personally inspected every division, as it marched to the front through the waning night, the cheerless dawn, the gray dark day. It cut him to the heart to see his soldiers go so silently and so sullenly. Here and there a regiment did cry: "*Vive l'Empereur*"; here and there a voice sounded it, but in the main the men marched dumbly, doggedly. It was only the old guard that gave him the imperial salute in full voice in the old way.

Nothing indicated to the Emperor more thoroughly the temper of the soldiers than that open indifference. Why, even in Russia, ere their stiffened lips froze into silence, they had breathed out the old acclaim. The Emperor remembered that grenadier who, when told by the surgeon that he feared to probe for a ball that had pierced his breast because he did not know what he would find, "If you probe deep enough to reach my heart," said the soldier with his dying breath, "you will find the Emperor."

Grave-faced and frowning, shivering from time to time in the fierce, raw cold, the Emperor watched the troops march by. Well, the day after to-morrow, if there were any left, they would acclaim him loud enough. The Emperor was cold and cynical. He had never allowed the life of men to stand in the way of his desires, but even his iron nerve, his icy indifference had been shaken. He gave no outward evidence of it, but in his heart he realized more plainly than ever before that when these were gone there were no more. And so, perhaps, his shudder was not altogether due to the cold.

Whatever his emotions, he steeled his heart, he made his preparations for the last try with fortune, the last card to be played, the last die to be thrown. What would be the end of it? What would be the result of that final desperate game? The Emperor was a master player--could even his finesse and skill and talent and genius make up for the poor hand that had been dealt him because the pack had been so drawn upon that the good cards had been exhausted, used up, long since?

Did the Emperor realize that even he was not what he had been? Did he comprehend that he was no longer the soldier, the man, of the past? Did he realize that at last he had tried the patience of that fortune he had worshiped, beyond the limit; and that whatever favor might be vouchsafed him would only delay the end?

The boys might march and fight, the old guard might sustain its ancient fame, the genius of the Emperor might flash out in full effulgence once more--and it would make no difference. The stars on their courses fought against Sisera. The doom sentence was written. Postponement he might look forward to, but no final stay of judgment! A few thousand more lives he might throw away, but these late sacrifices would avail nothing. Oh, no; the Emperor's shudder was not altogether due to the cold that winter morning.

CHAPTER IV

MARTEAU AND BAL-ARRET RIDE

Of this young Marteau and old Bullet Stopper, plodding along at the best speed they could get from their horses, knew nothing. The old grenadier was laconic by nature, and his habit of silence had become intensified by his years of subordination and service. The young officer was wrapped in his own thoughts. Knowing, as they did, every foot of the way, the two were able to find short cuts, take advantage of narrow paths over the hills and through the woods, which would have offered no passage to the army, even if they had been aware of it. They reached Sezanne hours before Marmont's advance, long before the cavalry even.

Baiting their horses, and getting a welcome meal at the inn--the town itself had as yet suffered nothing from the ravages of the Cossacks, being too strong for raiding parties--and refusing to answer questions, and paying no attention to wondering looks of the inhabitants, they rode out again. Their way through the marshes of St. Gond was dreadful. If only the weather would change, the ground would freeze, how welcome would be the altered conditions. But the half snow, the half rain, still beat down upon them. Their poor beasts were almost exhausted. They broke the ice of the Grand Morin river to get water for the horses and themselves, and, not daring to kindle a fire, for they were approaching the country occupied by Blucher, they made a scanty meal from their haversacks.

They had found the farmhouses and chateaux deserted, evidences of hasty flight and plunder on every side. The Cossacks had swept through the land beyond the town. The people who could had fled to Sezanne, or had gone westward hurriedly, to escape the raiders. In the ruined villages and farms they came across many dead bodies of old women, old men and children, with here and there a younger woman whose awful fate filled the old soldier and the young alike with grim and passionate rage.

"Yonder," said Marteau, gloomily pointing westward through the darkness, "lies Aumenier and my father's house."

"And mine," added Bullet-Stopper.

There was no need to express the thought further, to dilate upon it. It had been the Emperor's maxim that war should support war. His armies had lived off the country. The enemy had taken a leaf out of his own book. Even the stupid could not fight forever against Napoleon without learning something. The allies ate up the land, ravaged it,

tumed it into a desert--*lex talionis!*

Marteau's father still lived, with his younger sister. Old Bullet-Stopper was alone in the world but for his friends. What had happened in that little village yonder? What was going on in the great chateau, so long closed, now finally abandoned by the proud royalist family which had owned it and had owned Marteau and old Bullet-Stopper, and all the rest of the villagers, for that matter, for eight hundred years, or until the revolution had set them free?

Plunged in those gloomy thoughts the young officer involuntarily took a step in the direction of that village.

"On the Emperor's service," said the grenadier sternly, catching his young comrade by the arm. "Later," he continued, "we may go."

"You're right," said Marteau. "Let us move on."

Whether it was because the roads really were in a worse condition because of that fact that they ran through marshy country, or whether it was because the men were worn out and their horses more so, they made the slowest progress of the day. They plodded on determinedly through the night. The two weaker horses of the four finally gave way under the strain. Husbanding the remaining two with the greatest care, the two soldiers, passing through the deserted villages of St. Prix, on the Little Morin, and Baye, finally reached the great highroad which ran through Champaubert, Vauxchamps and Montmirail, toward Paris, and which, owing to a northward bend of the river, crossed the country some leagues to the southward of the Marne.

Day was breaking as they reached the edge of the forest bordering the road, and from a rather high hill had a glimpse of a wide stretch of country before them. Fortunately, while it was still raw and cold, the sun came out and gave them a fair view of a great expanse of rolling and open fields. A scene of great animation was disclosed to them. The road was covered with squadrons of green-coated Russian cavalry, evidently just called to the saddle, and moving eastward at a walk or slow trot. They looked like the advance guard of some important division. There was a low, rolling volume of heavy sound coming from the far north, and in the rising sun they thought they could distinguish in that direction smoke, as from a battlefield. The sound itself was unmistakable to the veteran.

"Cannon!" he said. "Fighting there."

"Yes," answered Marteau. "The Emperor said that the Prussians and Russians were pressing the Duke of Tarentum, Marshal Macdonald."

"But what have we here?" asked old Bal-Arret, shading his eyes and peering at the array on the near road.

A division of Russians, coming from a defile to the right, had debouched upon a broad plateau or level upon the edge of which the little village of Champaubert straggled forlornly. The Cossack horsemen and the Russian cavalry had cleaned out Champaubert. There were no inhabitants left to welcome the Russian division, except dead ones, who could offer no hospitality.

The division was weary and travel-stained, covered with mud, horses dead beat; the cannon, huge, formless masses of clay, were dragged slowly and painfully forward. It was evident that the commander of the division had doubled his teams, but the heavy guns could scarcely be moved, even by twice the number of horses attached. The poor brutes had no rest, for, as fast as one gun arrived, both teams were unhitched and sent over the road to bring up another. A halt was made on the plateau. It was evident to the experienced eyes of the watchers that a camp was about to be pitched. The two men stared in keen interest, with eyes alight with hatred. What they had seen in the country they had just passed intensified that hatred, and to the natural racial antagonism, fostered by years of war, were now added bitter personal resentments.

"That's one of old Marshal Forward's divisions," said the grenadier, referring to Blucher by his already accepted name, "but what one?"

"Russians, by the look of them," answered Marteau.

"You say well. I have seen those green caps and green overcoats before. Umph," answered Bullet-Stopper, making for him an extraordinarily long speech, "it was colder then than it is now, but we always beat them. At Friedland, at Eylau, at Borodino, aye, even at the Beresina. It was the cold and hunger that beat us. What wouldn't the guard give to be where we are now. Look at them. They are so sure of themselves that they haven't thrown out a picket or sentries."

In fact, neither Blucher nor any of his commanders apprehended any danger whatsoever. That Napoleon would

dare to fall on them was unthinkable. That there could be a single French soldier in their vicinity save those under Macdonald, being hard pressed by Yorck, never entered anybody's head.

"What Russians are they, do you think?" asked Marteau of his comrade.

"How should I know?" growled the other. "All Russians are alike to me, and----"

Marteau, however, had heard discussions during the time he had been on duty in Napoleon's headquarters.

"That will be Sacken's corps, unless I am very much mistaken," he said.

"And those up yonder toward Epemay, where the firing comes from?" asked the grenadier.

Marteau shook his head.

"We must find out," was the answer.

"Yes, but how?"

"I don't know."

"There is only one way," continued Bal-Arret.

"And that is?"

"To go over there, and----"

"In these uniforms?" observed the young officer. "We should be shot as soon as we should appear, and questioned afterward."

"Yes, if there was anything left to question," growled the grenadier. "The Russians will do some scouting. Perhaps some of them will come here. If so, we will knock them on the head and take their uniforms, wait until nightfall, slip through the lines, find out what we can, and go back and tell the Emperor. It is very simple."

"Quite so," laughed the young officer; "if we can catch two Russians, if their uniforms will fit us, if we can get through, if we can find out, if we can get back. Do you speak Russian, Bal-Arret?"

"Not a word."

"Prussian?"

"Enough to pass myself through I guess, and----"

"Hush," said the young man, as three Russians suddenly appeared out of a little ravine on the edge of the wood.

They had come on a foraging expedition, and had been successful, apparently, for, tied to a musket and carried between two of the men was a dead pig. How it had escaped the Cossack raiders of the day before was a mystery. They were apparently coming farther into the forest for firewood with which to roast the animal. Perhaps, as the pig was small, and, as they were doubtless hungry, they did not wish their capture to be widely known. At any rate, they came cautiously up a ravine and had not been noticed until their heads rose above it. They saw the two Frenchmen just about as soon as they were seen. The third man, whose arms were free, immediately presented his piece and pulled the trigger. Fortunately it missed fire. If it had gone off it might have attracted the attention of the Russian outposts, investigations would have been instituted, and all chance of passing the lines there would have been over.

At the same time he pulled the trigger he fell like a log. The grenadier, who had thrust into his belt a heavy knife, picked up from some murdered woodsman on the journey, had drawn it, seized it by the blade, and, with a skill born of olden peasant days, had hurled it at the Russian. The blade struck the man fairly in the face, and the sharp weapon plunged into the man to the hilt. He threw up his hands, his gun dropped, he crashed down into the ravine stone dead. The next second the two Frenchmen had seized the two Russians. The latter were taken at a disadvantage. They had retained their clutch on the gun-sling carrying the pig, and, before they realized what was toward--they were slow thinkers both--a pair of hands was clasped around each throat. The Russians were big men, and they struggled hard. A silent, terrible battle was waged under the trees, but, try as they would, the Russians could not get release from the terrible grasp of the Frenchmen. The breath left their bodies, their eyes protruded, their faces turned black.

Marteau suddenly released his prisoner, who dropped heavily to the ground. To bind him with his own breast and gun straps and belt was a work of a few moments. When he had finished he tore a piece of cloth from the coat of the soldier and thrust it into his mouth to gag him. The grenadier had a harder time with his enemy, who was the bigger of the two men, but he, too, mastered him, and presently both prisoners lay helpless, bound and gagged. The two Frenchmen rose and stared at each other, a merry twinkle in the eyes of old Bullet-Stopper, a very puzzled expression in those of the young soldier.

"Well, here's our disguise," said the old soldier.

"Quite so," interposed the officer. "But what shall we do with these two?"

"Nothing simpler. Knock them in the head after we have found out what we can from them, and----"

But Marteau shook his head.

"I can't murder helpless prisoners," he said decisively.

"If you had seen what they did to us in Russia you wouldn't have any hesitation on that score," growled the grenadier. "I had comrades whom they stripped naked and turned loose in the snow. Some of them they buried alive, some they gave to the wolves, some they burned to death. I have no more feeling for them than I have for reptiles or devils."

"I can't do it," said the younger soldier stubbornly. "We must think of some other way."

Old Bullet-Stopper stood frowning, trying to think of some argument by which to overcome these foolish scruples, when an idea came to his friend.

"About half a mile back we passed a deserted house. Let's take them there and leave them. There will probably be ropes or straps. We can bind them. They will be sheltered and perhaps somebody may come along and release them."

"Yes, doubtless somebody will," said the grenadier gravely, thinking that if somebody proved to be a peasant their release would be an eternal one, and glad in the thought. "Very well, you are in command. Give your order."

At Marteau's direction the straps around the feet of the men were loosened, they were compelled to get up; they had been disarmed, of course, and by signs they were made to march in the required direction. Casting a backward glance over the encampment, to see whether the absence of the three had been noticed, and, discerning no excitement of any sort, Marteau followed the grenadier and the two prisoners. Half a mile back in the woods stood the hut. It was a stoutly built structure, of logs and stone. A little clearing lay around it. For a wonder it had not been burned or broken down, although everything had been cleaned out of it by raiders. The door swung idly on its hinges. The two Russians were forced to enter the hut. They were bound with ropes, of which there happened to be some hanging from a nail, the door was closed, huge sticks from a surrounding fence were driven into the ground against it, so that it could not be opened from the inside, and the men were left to their own devices.

As neither Frenchman spoke Russian, and as the Russians understood neither French nor Prussian, conversation was impossible. Everything had to be done by signs.

"I wouldn't give much for their chance, shut up in that house in this wood," said the grenadier, as the two walked away.

"Nor I," answered Marteau. "But at least we haven't killed them."

The two Frenchmen now presented a very different appearance. Before they left the hut they had taken off their own great coats, the bearskin shako of the grenadier, and the high, flat-topped, bell-crowned cap of the line regiment of the officer. In place of these they wore the flat Russian caps and the long Russian overcoats. Bal-Arret might serve for a passable Russian, but no one could mistake Marteau for anything but a Frenchman. Still, it had to be chanced.

The two retraced their steps and came to the ravine, where the dead Russian lay. They had no interest in him, save the grenadier's desire to get his knife back. It had served him well, it might be useful again. But they had a great interest in the pig. Their exhausted horses were now useless, and they had thought they would have to kill one to get something to eat. But the pig, albeit he was a lean one, was a treasure indeed. To advance upon the Russian line in broad daylight would have been madness. Darkness was their only hope. Reaching down into the ravine, the grenadier hoisted the body of the poor pig to his comrade, and the two of them lugged it back far in the woods where it was safe

to kindle a fire. With flint and steel and tinder, they soon had a blaze going in the sequestered hollow they had chosen, and the smell of savory roast presently delighted their fancy. They ate their fill for the first time in weeks be it remarked. If they only had a bottle of the famous wine of the country to wash it down they would have feasted like kings.

"So far," said the grenadier, when he could eat no more, "our expedition has been successful. If those youngsters down at Nogent could only smell this pig there would be no holding them."

"I think it would be well to cook as much of it as we can carry with us. I don't know when we may get any more."

"That is well thought on," agreed the old soldier. "Always provide for the next meal when you can."

"And, with what's left, as we can't be far from the hut, we'll give those two poor Russians something to eat."

"You're too tender-hearted, my lad," said Bullet-Stopper, his face clouded, "ever to be a great soldier, I am afraid."

On an expedition of this kind rank was forgotten, and the humble subordinate again assumed the role of the advisor. Marteau laughed.

"Rather than let them starve I would knock them in the head," he said.

"That's what I wanted to do," growled the other savagely.

When it came to the issue, however, he really did respect the rank of his young friend. Accordingly, pieces of the roast pig were taken to the hut and placed in reach of the prisoners, who were found bound as before and looking very miserable. Yet there was something suspicious in their attitude. The old grenadier turned one of them over and discovered that one had endeavored to free the other by gnawing at the ropes. Not much progress had been made in the few hours that had elapsed, but still it was evident that the rope would eventually be bitten through and the men freed. He pointed this out to his officer.

"Better finish them now," he said.

But Marteau shook his head.

"It will take them all day and night to get free at that rate; by that time we will be far away, and it will be too late."

"But if they should tell what they have seen?"

"What can they tell? Only that two Frenchmen fell upon them. No, let them be. Set the food on the floor here. If they get hungry they can roll over toward it and eat it."

The gags had been taken out of the mouths of the men. If they did give the alarm there would be none to hear them, save perhaps a French peasant passing that way, and at his hands they would meet short shrift.

Having stuffed their haversacks full of roast pig, they retraced their steps and reached the edge of the clearing. It was noon by this time, so much of the day had been spent in the various undertakings that have been described, but the Russians were still there. Evidently they intended to encamp for the day and rest. Probably it was part of the program. These would move on, presumably on the morrow, and another division of the army would come up and take their places. The firing still continued on the horizon.

Marteau, who had a soldierly instinct, divined that the cavalry, which had long since disappeared to the westward, would try to outflank Macdonald, perhaps get in his rear, and this Russian division would move up and join Yorck's attacking force. The whole proceeding was leisurely. There was no especial hurry. There was no use tiring out the men and fighting desperate battles when maneuvering would serve.

The two made a more careful investigation and discovered that trees led across the road about half a mile to the left, and, although the roads were filled with galloping couriers and many straggling men and small commands, yet they decided that by going to the edge of the wood that touched the road and watching their opportunity they could get across unnoticed.

While they stared deliberating a squadron of cavalry, not of Cossacks, but of Russian cuirassiers left the camp and moved off down the cross-road that led to the south and west--the road, indeed, that led to the Chateau d'Auménier. The officer in command rode in front and with him were several civilians, at least, while they were covered

with heavy fur cloaks, no uniform was visible, and among the civilians was one unmistakably a woman. A Frenchman always had an eye for a woman. The party was too far away to distinguish features, but the two men noted the air of distinction about the party and the way the woman rode her horse, the deference that appeared to be paid to her, and they wasted no little time in wondering what might be toward. However, no explanation presenting itself to their minds, and, the matter being of no great importance after all, they turned their attention to the business in hand.

Working their way through the trees they reached a little coppice close to the road. They lay down on the ground back of the coppice, wormed their way into it, and waited.

"Here we part," said Marteau. "There are but two of us. We must get all the information we can. I will find out what division this is in front of us, and I will go back along the road to the eastward and ascertain where the other divisions are, and by nightfall I will return to Sezanne to report to the Emperor."

"And what am I to do?" asked the grenadier. "Remain here?"

"You will cross the road and proceed in the direction of the firing. Find out, if you can, how the battle goes, what troops are there, what Marshal Macdonald is doing, and at nightfall retrace your steps and hasten back to Sezanne."

"Where shall I meet you?"

"Let me think," answered Marteau. "I shall first go east and then west, if I can get around that division ahead yonder. Let us take the road to d'Aumenier. I will meet you at the old chateau at ten o'clock, or not later than midnight. There is a by-road over the marsh and through the forest by the bank of the river to Sezanne."

"I know it."

"Very well, then. It is understood?"

Old Bullet-Stopper nodded.

"The road is clear," he said. "Good luck."

The two men rose to their feet, shook hands.

"We had better go separately," said Marteau. "You have the longer distance. You first. I will follow."

The officer watched the old grenadier anxiously. He passed the road safely, ran across the intervening space, and disappeared in a little clump of fruit trees surrounding a deserted farmhouse. The young man waited, listening intently for the sound of a shot or struggle, but he heard nothing. Then he turned, stepped out into the road, saw it was empty for the moment, set his face eastward, and moved across it to see what he could find out beyond.

CHAPTER V

WHEN THE COSSACKS PASSED

For the first time in years the great hall of the Chateau d'Aumenier was brightly lighted. The ancient house stood in the midst of a wooded park adjacent to the village, overlooking one of the little lakes whose outlets flowed into the Morin. In former days it had been the scene of much hospitality, and, even after the revolution in the period of the consulate and the early empire, representatives of the ancient house had resided there, albeit quietly and in greatly diminished style. The old Marquis Henri, as uncompromising a royalist soldier as ever lived, had fled to England and had remained there. His younger brother, Robert, compromising his dignity and his principles alike, had finally made his submission to Napoleon and received back the estates, or what had not been sequestered. But he had lived there quietly, had sought no preferment of the government--even rejecting many offers--and had confined his recognition to as narrow limits as possible. He had married and there had been born to him a daughter, whom he had named after the ancient dames of his honorable house, Laure.

The Count d'Aumenier, living thus retired, had fallen into rather careless habits after the death of his wife, and the little demoiselle had been brought up indifferently indeed. Dark, brown-eyed, black-haired, she had given promise of

beauty to come. Left to her own devices she had acquired accomplishments most unusual in that day and by no means feminine. She could ride, shoot, swim, run, fence, much better than she could dance the old courtly minuet, or the new and popular waltz, just beginning to make its appearance. A love of reading and an ancient library in which she had a free range had initiated her into many things which the well-brought-up French girl was not supposed to know, and which, indeed, many of them went to their graves without ever finding out. The Count had a well-stored mind, and on occasion he gave the child the benefit of it, while leaving her mainly to her own devices.

Few of the ancient nobility had come back to the neighborhood. Their original holdings had been portioned out among the new creations of the Imperial Wizard, and with them the Count held little intercourse. Laure d'Aumenier had not reached the marriageable age, else some of the newly made gentry would undoubtedly have paid court to her. She found companions among the retainers of her father's estate. The devotion of some of them had survived the passionate hatreds of the revolution and, failing the Marquis, who was the head of the house, they loyally served his brother, and with pride and admiration gave something like feudal worship and devotion to the little lady.

The Marquis, an old man now, had never forgiven his brother, the Count, for his compromise with principle and for his recognition of the "usurper," as he was pleased to characterize Napoleon. He had refused even to accept that portion of the greatly diminished revenue of the estate which the younger brother had regularly remitted to the Marquis' bankers in London. The whole amount lay there untouched and accumulating, although, as were many other emigres, the Marquis frequently was hard pressed for the bare necessities of life. With every year, as Bonaparte--for that was the only name by which he thought of him--seemed to be more and more thoroughly established on the throne, the resentment of the Marquis had grown. Latterly he had refused to hold any communication with his brother.

The year before the Battle of the Nations, or just before Napoleon set forth on his ill-fated Russian adventure, Count Robert d'Aumenier died. With an idea of amendment, which showed how his conscience had smitten him for his compromise, he left everything he possessed to his brother, the Marquis, including his daughter, Laure, who had just reached her sixteenth year. With the will was a letter, begging the Marquis to take the young demoiselle under his charge, to complete that ill-begun and worse-conducted education, the deficiencies of which the father too late realized, in a manner befitting her station, and to provide for her marriage with a proper portion, as if she had been his own daughter. The Marquis had never married himself, lacking the means to support his rank, and it was probable that he never would marry.

The Marquis was at first minded to refuse the bequest and to disregard the appeal, but an old retainer of the family, none other than Jean Marteau, the elder, complying with Count Robert's dying wish, had taken the young Countess Laure across the channel, and had quietly left her in her uncle's care, he himself coming back to act as steward or agent for the remaining acres of the shrunken Aumenier domain; for the Marquis, having chosen a course and walked in it for so many years, was not minded even for the sake of being once more the lord of Aumenier to go back to France, since the return involved the recognition of the powers that were.

Old Jean Marteau lived in his modest house between the village and the chateau. And the chateau had been closed for the intervening time. Young Jean Marteau, plodding along the familiar way, after a day full of striking adventure and fraught with important news, instantly noticed the light coming through the half moons in the shutters over the windows of the chateau, as he came around a brow of the hill and overlooked the village, the lake and the castle in the clearing. The village was as dark as the chateau was light.

Marteau was ineffably weary. He had been without sleep for thirty-six hours, he had ridden twenty leagues and walked--Heaven only knew how many miles in addition. He had extricated himself from desperate situations only by his courage, daring, and, in one or two cases, by downright fighting, rendered necessary by his determination to acquire accurate information for the Emperor. He had profited, not only by his instruction in the military school, but by his campaigning, and he now carried in his mind a disposition of the Russian forces which would be of the utmost value to the Emperor.

The need of some rest, however, was absolute. Marmont's troops, starting out at the same time he had taken his departure, would barely have reached Sezanne by this time, so much more slowly did an army move than a single person. The Emperor, who had intimated that he would remain at Nogent until the next day, would scarcely undertake the march before morning. Aumenier lay off to the northwest of Sezanne, distant a few miles. If the young aide could find something to eat and get a few hours' sleep, he could be at Sezanne before the Emperor arrived and his information would be ready in the very nick of time. With that thought, after staring hard at the chateau in some little wonderment, he turned aside from the road that led to its entrance and made for the village.

His mother had died the year before; his father and his sister, with one or two attendants, lived alone. There was

no noble blood in Marteau's veins, as noble blood is counted, but his family had been followers and dependents of the Aumeniers for as many generations as that family had been domiciled in France. Young Jean Marteau had not only been Laure d'Aumenier's playmate, but he had been her devoted slave as well. To what extent that devotion had possessed him he had not known until returning from the military school he had found her gone.

The intercourse between the young people had been of the frankest and pleasantest character, but, in spite of the sturdy respectability of the family and the new principles of equality born of the revolution, young Marteau realized--and if he had failed to do so his father had enlightened him--that there was no more chance of his becoming a suitor, a welcome suitor, that is, for the hand of Laure d'Aumenier than there was of his becoming a Marshal of France.

Indeed, as in the case of many another soldier, that last was not an impossibility. Men infinitely more humble than he in origin and with less natural ability and greatly inferior education had attained that high degree. If Napoleon lived long enough and the wars continued and he had the opportunity, he, too, might achieve that coveted distinction. But not even that would make him acceptable to Count Robert, no matter what his career had been; and even if Count Robert could have been persuaded the old Marquis Henri would be doubly impossible.

So, on the whole, Jean Marteau had been glad that Laure d'Aumenier had gone out of his life. He resolved to put her out of his heart in the same way, and he plunged with splendid energy into the German campaign of 1813, with its singular alternations of success and failure, of victory and defeat, of glory and shame. He had been lucky enough to win his captain's commission, and now, as a major, with a position on the staff of the Emperor, he could look forward to rapid advancement so long as the Emperor lasted. With the bright optimism of youth, even though affairs were now so utterly hopeless that the wise old marshals despaired, Marteau felt that his foot was on the first rung of the ladder of fame and prosperity, and, in spite of himself, as he had approached his native village, he had begun to dream again, almost to hope.

There was something ominous, however, in the appearance of the village in that dark gray evening hour. There were no barking dogs, no clucking hens, no lowing cattle, no sounds of childish laughter, no sturdy-voiced men or softer-spoken women exchanging greetings. The stables and sheds were strangely silent.

The village was a small one. He turned into it, entered the first house, stumbled over a corpse! The silence was of death. With a beating heart and with a strength he did not know he possessed, he turned aside and ran straight to his father's house.

Standing by itself it was a larger, better and more inviting house than the others. The gate of the surrounding stone wall was battered off the hinges, the front door of the house was open, the garden was trampled. The house had been half destroyed. A dead dog lay in front of the door. He could see all that in the half light. He ran down the path and burst into the wrecked and plundered living room. A few feeble embers still glowed in the broad hearth. From them he lighted a candle standing on the mantel shelf.

The first sight that greeted him was the body of his sister, her torn clothing in frightful disarray, a look of agony and horror upon her white set face under its dishevelled hair. She was stone dead. He knelt down and touched her. She was stone cold, too. He stared at her, a groan bursting from his lips. The groan brought forth another sound. Was it an echo? Lifting the candle, he looked about him. In a far corner lay a huddled human body. He ran to it and bent over it. It was his father. Knowing the house like a book, he ran and fetched some water. There were a few mouthfuls of spirits left in a flask of vodka he had found in the Russian's overcoat. He bathed his father's face, forced a few drops of the strong spirit down his throat, and the old man opened his eyes. In the flickering light he caught sight of the green cap and coat.

"Curse you," he whispered.

"My father!" cried the young officer. "It is I."

"My son!"

"What has happened?"

"The Cossacks--I fought for the honor of your sister. Where----" the old man's voice faltered.

"She is dead yonder," answered the son.

"Thank God," came the faint whisper from the father. "Mademoiselle Laure--she--the wagon-train--the castle----"

His voice died away, his eyes closed. Frantically the young man recalled his father to his senses again.

"It's no use," whispered the old man, "a ball in the breast. I am going. What do you here?"

"On the service of the Emperor," answered the young officer. "Father, speak to me!"

"Alas--poor--France," came the words slowly, one by one, and then--silence.

Marteau had seen death too many times not to know it now. He laid the old man's head gently down, he straightened his limbs, he went over to the form of the poor girl. To what horrors she had been subjected--like every other woman in the village--before she died! Like his father, he thanked God that she was dead. He lifted her up tenderly and laid her down on a huge settle by the fireplace. He stood a moment, looking from one to the other. The irreligion of the age had not seized him. He knelt down and made a prayer. Having discharged that duty, he lifted his hands to heaven and his lips moved. Was he invoking a curse upon these enemies? He turned quickly and went out into the night, drawing the door behind him, fastening it as tight as he could.

He forgot that he was hungry, that he was thirsty, that he was tired, that he was cold. For the moment he almost forgot his duty toward his Emperor and France, as he walked rapidly through the trees toward the great house. But as he walked that stern obligation came back to him. His sister was dead, his father murdered. Well, the first Cossack he came upon should pay. Meanwhile there was his duty. What had his father said?

"The Cossacks--the wagon-train--the Countess Laure."

What did it mean? Part of it was plain enough. The Cossacks had raided the village, his father had been stricken down defending his daughter, his sister had died. That was easy, but the wagon-train, the castle, the Countess Laure? Could she have come back? Was that the occasion for the lights in the chateau? That body of cavalry that he had seen leaving Sacken's men that morning with the civilians--was she that woman? The mystery would be solved at the chateau. And it was there he had arranged to meet his comrade, anyway.

He stopped and looked back at the devastated village. Already a light was blazing in one of the houses. It would soon be afire. He could do nothing then. The chateau called him. He broke into a run again, heavy-footed and tired out though he was. Around the chateau in the courtyard were dozens of wagons. His experienced glance told him that they were army wagons, containing provisions, arms, ammunition. Some of the covers had been raised to expose the contents. There was not a living man present, and scarcely a living horse. There had been some sort of a battle evidently, for the wagons were in all sorts of confusion and there were dead men and horses everywhere. He did not stop to examine them save to make sure that the dead men were French, proving that the convoy had come from Paris. He threaded his way among the wagons and finally reached the steps that led to the broad terrace upon which rose the chateau.

The main door was open. There were no soldiers about, which struck him as peculiar, almost terrifying. He went up the steps and across the terrace, and stopped before the building, almost stumbling over the bodies of two men whose uniforms were plainly Russian! He inspected them briefly and stepped toward the door of the entrance hall. It was open but dimly lighted, and the light wavered fitfully. The faint illumination came into the hall from a big broad open door upon the right, giving entrance to what had been the great room. Still keeping within the shadow, he moved carefully and noiselessly into the hall, until he could get a view of the room beyond.

A huge fire was burning in the enormous fireplace. The many tables with which the room had been furnished had been pushed together in the center, several tall candles pulled from the candelabra and fastened there by their own melted wax stood upon these tables and added their illumination to the fire-light. Several men in uniforms, two of them rough-coated Cossacks, and two whose dress showed clearly that they belonged to the Russian Imperial Guard, lay on the floor, bound and helpless. A stout, elderly man, in civilian garb, with a very red face and an angry look, his wig awry, was lashed to a chair. Between two ruffianly looking men, who held her firmly, stood a woman.

There were perhaps two dozen other men in the room, unkempt, savage, brutal, armed with all sorts of nondescript weapons from ancient pistols to fowling pieces, clubs and scythes. They were all in a state of great excitement, shouting and gesturing madly.

The woman standing between the two soldiers was in the full light. So soon as he caught sight of her Marteau recognized her. It was Laure d'Aumenier. She had grown taller and more beautiful than when he had seen her last as a young girl. She had been handled roughly, her clothes were torn, her hair partially unbound. Her captors held her with an iron grasp upon her arms, but she did not flinch or murmur. She held herself as erect and looked as imperious as if

she had been on a throne.

CHAPTER VI

MARTEAU BARGAINS FOR THE WOMAN

The sight of her predicament filled the young Frenchman with rage and horror. Drawing his pistol, he strode into the room. What he intended to do, or how he intended to do it was not clear even to him. There stood the woman he loved in the clutch of wretches whose very touch was pollution. He must help her. All duties and intentions gave way to that determination.

A dead silence fell over the room as he entered and the people caught sight of him. He stood staring at the occupants and they returned his stare in good measure. Finally the biggest ruffian, who seemed to be the leader, found his voice and burst out with a savage oath:

"Another Russian! Well, the more the merrier."

He raised a huge horse pistol as he spoke. His words were greeted with jeers and yells from the band. With a flash of inspiration Marteau, realizing into what he had been led, dropped his own weapon and instantly threw up his hands.

"I am French, messieurs," he cried loudly as the pistol clattered on the floor at his feet.

"What are you doing in that uniform, then?" roared the leader.

Marteau tore open the heavy green coat, disclosing beneath it his French uniform. He had a second to make up his mind how to answer that pertinent question. He was quite in the dark as to the meaning of the mysterious situation. He opened his mouth and spoke.

"It is quite simple," he began, "I am---"

What should he say? What was he? Were these men for the Emperor or for the king, or were they common blackguards for themselves? The latter was probably the true state of the case, but did it please them to pose as royalists? He took a long chance after a quick prayer because he wanted to live not so much for himself as for the woman.

"I am deserting the Emperor," he said. "I am for the king."

"No king could have brought us to worse straits than we are now in," said the leader, lowering his pistol uncertainly, but still keeping the young man covered.

"Right, my friend," continued Marteau exultantly, realizing that he had made the right choice. "Bonaparte is beaten, Blucher is marching on Paris, Schwarzenberg has the Emperor surrounded. I thought I might as well save myself while I had the chance, so I stole this Russian coat to keep myself from freezing to death, and here I am. I belong to Aumenier."

"You'll join us, then?"

"With pleasure. Who do you serve?"

"Ourselves," laughed the leader grimly. "We're from Fere-Champenoise way. We're all of the village and countryside that the Cossacks and the Prussians have left of our families. We're hungry, starving, naked. Do you hear? We were hiding in the woods hard by to-day. There was a wagon-train. A regiment of Cossacks surprised it, killed its defenders, brought it here. We saw it all."

"And where are the Cossacks gone?" asked the young man, coolly picking up his pistol from the floor and nonchalantly sitting upon the nearest table in a careless way which certainly belied the beating of his heart. He took careful notice of the men. They were ignorant fellows of the baser sort, half-mad, starving, ferocious peasants, little better than brute beasts, made so by the war.

"An order came for them. They marched away, leaving a company of other soldiers like those yonder." He pointed to the men on the floor.

"And what became of them?"

"There was an attack from the woods at night--a little handful of French soldiers. They beat them off and followed them down the road. They have been gone half an hour. We heard the firing. We came out thinking to plunder the train. We opened wagon after wagon but found nothing but arms. We can't eat steel or powder. We killed two sentries, made prisoners of the officers. We'll set fire to the house and leave them presently. As for this man, we'll kill him, and as for this woman----"

He laughed meaningly, basely, leering at the girl in hideous suggestiveness that made her shudder; and which his wretched companions found highly amusing.

"You have done well," said the young officer quickly, although he was cold with rage at the ruffian's low insinuation. "I hope to have some interest with the king later. If you will give me your names I will see that you are rewarded."

"Never mind our names," growled the leader, still suspicious, evidently.

"Food and drink would reward us better now," shouted a second.

"Aye," yelled one of the others, seconding this happy thought. "We have eaten nothing since yesterday, and as for drink, it is a week since my lips have tasted a swallow of wine."

"And what would you give me if I could procure you some of the fine wine of the country, my friends?" said Marteau quietly, putting great restraint upon himself to continue trafficking with these scoundrels.

"Give? Anything," answered several in chorus, their red eyes gleaming.

"If you've got it we'll take it for nothing," said the brutal leader with ferocious cunning.

"Do I look as if I concealed wine and provisions on my person?" asked the officer boldly, confident now that he had found the way to master these men.

"No," was the answer. "But where is it?"

"And be quick about it," cried a second threateningly. "Those Russians may be back at any moment."

"Is this a jest?" asked a third with a menacing gesture.

"It would be ill-done to joke with men as hungry as you are, I take it," answered Marteau.

"Hurry, then," cried a fourth.

"In good time, my friends. First, a word with you. What are you going to do with those two prisoners?"

"Knock the men in the head, I told you," answered the leader.

"And the woman?"

"We are trying to settle who should have her--first."

"It's a pity there's only one, still----" began another.

"I'll make a bargain with you, then," interrupted Marteau quickly, fingering his weapon while he spoke. "Food and drink in plenty for you, the woman for me."

"And what do you want of the woman?"

"Before I was a soldier I lived in Aumenier, I told you. I served these people. This woman is an aristocrat. I hate her."

It was an old appeal and an old comment but it served. These were wild days like those of the revolution, the license and rapine and ravagings of which some of the older men present could very well recall.

"She treated me like dirt under her feet," went on the officer. "Now I want to have my turn."

"Marteau!" cried the woman for the first time, recognizing him as he turned a grim face toward her, upon which he had very successfully counterfeited a look of hatred. "Is it indeed----"

"Silence," thundered the young soldier, stepping near to her and shaking his clenched fist in her face. "These worthy patriots will give you to me, and then----"

There was a burst of wild laughter throughout the room.

"It's these cursed aristocrats that have brought these hateful Russians upon us," cried one.

"Give her to the lad and let us have food and drink," cried another.

"He'll deal with her," cried a third.

"You hear?" asked the chief.

"I hear," answered Marteau. "Listen. My father kept this house for its owners. He is dead in the village yonder."

"The wine, the wine," roared one, licking his lips.

"Food. I starve," cried another, baring his teeth.

"Wait. Naturally, fleeing from the army, I came to him. My sister is dead too, outraged, murdered. You know?"

"Yes, yes, we know."

"I want to get my revenge on someone and who better than she?"

The young officer did not dare again to look at the young woman. He could feel the horror, the amazement, the contempt in her glance. Was this one of the loyal Marteaux?

"Make her suffer for us!"

"Our children!"

"Our mothers!"

"Our daughters!" cried one after the other, intoxicated with their wrongs, real or fancied, their faces black with rage, their clenched hands raised to heaven as if invoking vengeance.

"Have no fear," said Marteau. "Because of my father's position I know where the wine cellar is, and there is food there."

"Lead on," said the chief. "We've talked too much."

"This way," replied the young captain, lifting the only candlestick from the table. "Leave two men to watch the woman and give the alarm, the rest follow me."

Marteau knew the old castle like a book. He knew where the keys were kept. Chatting carelessly and giving them every evidence of his familiarity, he found the keys, unlocked the doors, led them from room to room, from level to level, until finally they reached the wine cellar. It was separated from the cellar in which they stood by a heavy iron-bound oaken door. In spite of his easy bearing and manner, suspicions had been aroused in the uneasy minds of the rabble, but when Marteau lifted the candle and bade them bring their own lights and see through an iron grating in the door what the chamber beyond contained and they recognized the casks and bottles, to say nothing of hams, smoked meats and other eatables, their suspicions vanished. They burst into uproarious acclamation.

"Hasten," cried the leader.

"This is the last door."

"Have you the key?"

"It is here."

Marteau lifted the key, thrust it in the lock and turned it slowly, as if by a great effort and, the door opening outward, he drew it back.

"Enter," he said. "Help yourselves."

With cries of joy like famished wolves the whole band poured into the wine cellar. All, that is, but Marteau. As the last men entered he flung the door to and with astonishing quickness turned the key in the lock and turned away. The door had shut with a mighty crash, the noise had even stopped the rioting plunderers. The first man who had seized a bottle dropped it crashing to the floor. All eyes and faces turned toward the door. The last man threw himself against it frantically. It held as firmly as if it had been the rock wall. They were trapped. The leader was quicker than the rest. He still had his weapon. Thrusting it through the iron bars of the grating in the door he pulled the trigger. There was a mighty roar, a cloud of smoke, but fortunately in the dim light his aim was bad. Marteau laughed grimly.

"Enjoy yourselves, messieurs. The provisions are good and you may eat as much as you like. The wine is excellent. Drink your fill!"

The next instant he leaped up the stairs and retraced his steps. It was a long distance from the wine-cellar to the great room, but through the grating that gave entrance to the courtyard the sound of shots had penetrated. One of the ruffians, committing the woman to the care of the remaining man, started to follow his comrades. He had his pistol in his hand. He went noisily, muttering oaths, feeling that something was wrong but not being able to divine exactly what. Marteau heard him coming. He put the candle down, concealed himself and, as the man came, struck him heavily over the head with the butt of his remaining pistol. He fell like a log. Leaving the candle where it was, the young officer, dispossessing his victim of his pistols, entered the hall and, instead of entering the great room by the door by which he had left it, ran along the hall to the main entrance and thus took the remaining brigand in the rear.

This man was one of those who had seized the Countess Laure. In spite of herself the girl started as the officer appeared in the doorway. The man felt her start, wheeled, his eyes recognized the officer. He had no pistol, but his fingers went to his belt and with the quickness of light itself he hurled a knife straight at Marteau. The woman with equal speed caught the man's arm and disturbed his aim. Her movement was purely instinctive. According to his own words she had even more to fear from Marteau than from this ruffian. The young officer instantly dropped to his knees and as he did so presented his pistol and fired. The knife whistled harmlessly over his head and buried itself in the wood paneling of the door. The bullet sped straight to its mark. The unfortunate blackguard collapsed on the floor at the feet of the girl, who screamed and shrank back shuddering.

"Now, mademoiselle," said the young man, advancing into the room, "I have the happiness to inform you that you are free."

CHAPTER VII

A RESCUE AND A SIEGE

The woman stared at him in wild amazement. That she was free temporarily at least, could not be gainsaid. Her captors had not seen fit to bind her and she now stood absolutely untouched by anyone. The shooting, the fighting, had confused her. She had only seen Marteau as an accomplice and friend of her assailants, she had no clew to his apparent change of heart. She did not know whether she had merely exchanged masters or what had happened. Smiling ironically at her bewilderment, which he somehow resented in his heart, Marteau proceeded to further explanation.

"You are free, mademoiselle," he repeated emphatically, bowing before her.

"But I thought----"

"Did you think that I could be allied with such cowardly thieves and vagabonds as those?"

"But you said----"

"It was simply a ruse. Could you imagine that one of my family, that I, should fail in respect and devotion to one of yours, to you? I determined to free you the instant I saw you."

"And will you not complete your good work?" broke out the man tied to the chair in harsh and foreign but sufficiently comprehensible French, "by straightway releasing me, young sir?"

"But who is this?"

"This is Sir Gervaise Yeovil," answered Mademoiselle Laure, "my attorney, an English officer-of-the-law, of Lord Castlereagh's suite, who came with me from Chatillon to get certain papers and----"

"Why all this bother and explanation?" burst out Sir Gervaise. "Tell him to cut these lashes and release me from this cursed bondage," he added in English.

"That is quite another matter, sir," said Marteau gravely. "I regret that you are an enemy and that I can not----"

"But we are not enemies, Monsieur," cried one of the officers, who had just succeeded in working a gag out of his mouth. "We are Russian officers of the Imperial Guard and since you have deserted the cause of the Corsican you will--"

"Deserted!" thundered Marteau, his pale face flaming. "That was as much a ruse as the other."

"What, then, do you mean by wearing a Russian coat over your uniform and----"

"He is a spy. He shall be hanged," said the other, also freeing himself of his gag.

"Indeed," laughed Marteau. "And do you gentlemen ask me to release you in order that you may hang me?"

"I won't hang you," burst out the Englishman. "On the contrary, I'll give you fifty pounds if you'll cut these cords and----"

Marteau shook his head.

"Countess," bellowed Yeovil angrily, "there's a knife on the table yonder, pray do you----"

The young woman made a swift step in that direction, but the Frenchman was too quick for her.

"Pardon me, mademoiselle, I beg that the first use you make of your new life be not to aid my enemies."

"Your enemies, Marteau?"

"The enemies of France, then."

"Not my uncle's France," said the girl.

"But your father's, and I had hoped yours."

"No, no."

"In any event, these gentlemen must remain bound for the time being. No harm shall come to you from me," continued Marteau, addressing the two officers. "But as for these hounds----" He stepped over to the two Cossacks, who lay mute. He bent over them with such a look of rage, ruthless determination and evil purpose in his face as startled the woman into action.

"Monsieur!" she cried, stepping over to him and striving to interpose between him and the two men. "Marteau, what would you do?"

"My sister--dead in the cottage yonder after--after----" he choked out. He stopped, his fingers twitching. "My old father! If I served them right I would pitch them into yonder fireplace or torture them, the dogs, the cowards!"

"My friend," said the young Countess gently, laying her hand on his arm.

Marteau threw up his hands, that touch recalled him to his senses.

"I will let them alone for the present," he said. "Meanwhile----" He seized the dead man and dragged the body out of sight behind the tables.

"Will monsieur give a thought to me?" came another voice from the dim recesses of a far corner.

"And who are you?" asked Marteau, lifting the light and staring.

"A Frenchman, sir. They knocked me on the head and left me for dead, but if monsieur would assist me I----"

Marteau stepped over to him, bent down and lifted him up. He was a stout, hardy looking peasant boy, pale cheeked, with blood clotted around his forehead from a blow that he had received. Feverish fire sparkled in his eyes.

"If monsieur wishes help to put these brutes out of the way command me," he said passionately.

"We will do nothing with them at present," answered Marteau.

"Quick, Laure, the knife," whispered the Englishman.

The Frenchman heard him, however, and wheeled around.

"Mademoiselle," he cried, "on your honor I charge you not to abuse the liberty I have secured for you and that I allow you."

"But, my friends----"

"If you had depended on your friends you would even now be----" he paused--"as my sister," he added with terrific intensity.

"Your pleasure shall be mine," said the young woman.

"If I could have a drink of wine!" said the young peasant, sinking down into a chair.

"There is a flask which they did not get in the pocket of one of the officers yonder," said the young Frenchwoman, looking sympathetically at the poor exhausted lad.

Marteau quickly recovered it, in spite of the protestations of the officer, who looked his indignation at this little betrayal by the woman. He gave some of it to the peasant and then offered it to mademoiselle and, upon her declining it, took a long drink himself. He was weak and trembling with all he had gone through.

"Now, what's to be our further course?" asked the countess.

"I don't know yet. I----"

But the answer was never finished. Shots, cries, the sound of galloping horses came faintly through the open door.

"My men returning!" cried the Russian officer triumphantly. "Our turn will come now, sir!"

Two courses were open. To run or to fight. Duty said go; love said stay. Duty was stronger. After a moment's hesitation Marteau dashed for the door. He was too late. The returning Russian cavalry was already entering the courtyard. Fate had decided against him. He could not go now. He thought with the swiftness of a veteran. He sprang back into the hall, threw the great iron-bound door into its place, turned the massive key in its lock, thanking God that key and lock were still intact, dropped the heavy bars at top and bottom that further secured it, just as the first horseman thundered upon the door.

In his rapid passage through the house the young Frenchman had noticed that all the windows were shuttered and barred, that only the front door appeared to have been opened. He was familiar with the chateau. He knew how carefully its openings had been secured and how often his father had inspected them, to keep out brigands, the waifs and strays, the wanderers, the low men of the countryside. For the moment he was safe with his prisoners, one man and

a boy guarding a score of men and one woman, and holding a chateau against a hundred and fifty soldiers! Fortunately, there would be no cannon with that troop of cavalry, there were no cannon in that wagon train, so that they could not batter down the chateau over his head. What his ultimate fate would be he could not tell. Could he hold that castle indefinitely? If not, what? How he was to get away and reach Napoleon with his vital news he could not see. There must be some way, however. Well, whatever was to be would be, and meanwhile he could only wait developments and hold on.

The troopers outside were very much astonished to find the heavy door closed and the two sentries dead on the terrace. They dismounted from their horses at the foot of the terrace and crowded about the door, upon which they beat with their pistols, at the same time shouting the names and titles of the officers within. Inside the great hall Marteau had once more taken command. In all this excitement Laure d'Aumenier had stood like a stone, apparently indifferent to the appeals of the four bound men on the floor and the Englishman in the chair that she cut the ropes with which they were bound, while the French officer was busy at the door. Perhaps that young peasant might have prevented her, but as a matter of fact, she made no attempt to answer their pleas. She stood waiting and watching. Just as Marteau reentered the room the chief Russian officer shouted out a command. From where he lay on the floor his voice did not carry well and there was too much tumult outside for anyone to hear. In a second Marteau was over him.

"If you open your mouth again, monsieur," he said fiercely, "I shall have to choose between gagging and killing you, and I incline to the latter. And these other gentlemen may take notice. You, what are you named?"

"Pierre Lebois, sir," answered the peasant.

"Can you fire a gun?"

"Give me a chance," answered the young fellow. "I've got people dead, yonder, to avenge."

The brigands had left the swords and pistols of the officers on chairs, tables and the floor. There were eight pistols. Marteau gathered them up. The English baronet yielded one other, a huge, heavy, old-fashioned weapon.

"There are loopholes in the shutters yonder," said the officer. "Do you take that one, I will take the other. They will get away from the door in a moment and as soon as you can see them fire."

"Mademoiselle," said the Russian officer desperately, "I shall have to report to the commander of the guard and he to the Czar that you gave aid and comfort to our enemies."

"But what can I do?" asked the young woman. "Monsieur Marteau could certainly shoot me if I attempted----"

"Assuredly," said Marteau, smiling at her in a way anything but fierce.

It was that implicit trust in her that restrained her and saved him. As a girl the young countess had been intensely fond of Jean Marteau. He certainly appeared well in his present role before her. In the revulsion of feeling in finding him not a bully, not a traitor, but a devoted friend and servitor, he advanced higher in her estimation than ever before. Besides, the young woman was by no means so thoroughgoing a loyalist as her old uncle, for instance.

"I can see them now, monsieur," said the young peasant from the peep-hole in the shutter.

Indeed, the men outside had broken away from the door, groups were running to and fro seeking lights and some other entrance. Taking aim at the nearest Marteau pulled the trigger and Pierre followed his example. The noise of the explosions was succeeded by a scream of anguish, one man was severely wounded and another killed. Something mysterious had happened while they had been off on the wild goose chase apparently, the Russians decided. The chateau had been seized, their officers had been made way with, it was held by the enemy.

"They can't be anything more than wandering peasants," cried an imperious voice in Russian outside. "I thought you had made thorough work with them all, Scoref," continued the speaker. "Your Cossacks must have failed to complete the job."

"It will be the first time," answered Scoref, the *hetman* of the raiders. "Look, the village burns!"

"Well, what's to be done now?" said the first voice.

"I don't know, Baron," was the answer. "Besieging castles is more in your line than in mine."

"Shall we fire again, monsieur?" asked Pierre within.

"No," was the answer. "Remember we've only got eight shots and we must wait."

"Let us have lights," cried the commander of the squadron. "Here, take one of those wagons and----"

In a few moments a bright fire was blazing in the courtyard.

"The shots came from those windows," continued the Russian. "Keep out of the way and---- Isn't that a window open up there?"

"It is, it is!" came the answer from a dozen throats.

All the talk being in Russian was, of course, not understood by the two Frenchmen.

"One of you climb up there," continued the Russian. "You see the spout, and the coping, that buttress? Ten roubles to the man who does it."

A soldier sprang forward. Those within could hear his heavy body rub along the wall. They did not know what he was doing or what was toward. They were in entire ignorance that a shutter had become detached from its hinges in the room above the drawing-room and that they would soon have to face an attack from the rear. The man who climbed fancied himself perfectly secure, and indeed he was from those within. It was a hard climb, but presently he reached the window-ledge. His hands clasped it, he made a brave effort, drew himself up and on the instant from beyond the wagons came a pistol shot. The man shrieked, released his hold and fell crashing to the ground. The besiegers broke into wild outcries. Some of them ran in the direction whence the shot had come. They thought they caught the glimpse of a figure running away in the darkness. Pistols were fired and the vicinity was thoroughly searched, but they found nothing.

The shot, the man's cry overhead, the body crashing down to the ground, enlightened Marteau. He handed Pierre two of the six remaining pistols, told him to run to the floor above and watch the window. The young peasant crossed himself and turned away. He found the room easily enough. It was impossible to barricade the window, but he drew back in the darkness and waited.

Having found no one in the grove beyond the baggage-wagons, the Russians called for another volunteer and a second man offered. Pierre heard him coming, permitted him to gain the ledge and then thrust the pistol in his face and pulled the trigger. At the same time a big Cossack coming within easy range and standing outlined between the loophole and the fire, Marteau gave him his second bullet, with fatal effect. There flashed into his mind that the shot which had come so opportunely from outside bespoke the arrival of his friend, the grenadier. He hoped the man would have sense enough to go immediately to Sezanne and report the situation. If he could maintain the defense of the castle for two hours he might be rescued. He stepped to the hall and called up to Pierre. Receiving a cheery reply to the effect that all was well and that he would keep good watch, he came back into the great hall and resumed his ward.

CHAPTER VIII

A TRIAL OF ALLEGIANCE

Mademoiselle d'Aumenier had seated herself at a table and remained there in spite of the entreaties and black looks of the prisoners. Marteau did not dare to leave his loophole, but the necessity for watching did not prevent him from talking. The men outside seemed to have decided that nothing more could be done for the present. They withdrew from out of range of the deadly fire of the defenders and, back of the wagons, kindled fires, and seemed to be preparing to make a night of it.

The best officers of the detachment were prisoners in the chateau. The subordinate who had been entrusted with the pursuit was young and inexperienced; the Cossack commander was a mere raider. They themselves belonged to the cavalry. They decided, after inspecting the whole building carefully as nearly as they dared in view of the constant threat of discharge, that they would have to wait until morning, unless something occurred to them or some chance favored them. They trusted that at daylight they would have no difficulty in effecting an entrance somewhere. A total

of three men dead and one wounded, to say nothing of the sentries and officers, had a discouraging effect on night work. They did not dream that there was an enemy, a French soldier, that is, nearer than Troyes. They supposed that the castle had been seized by some of the enraged country people who had escaped the Cossacks and that they could easily deal with them in the morning.

Incidentally, the wine cellars in which the peasants had been shut had openings to the outer air, and through them came shouts and cries which added to the mystification of the besiegers and increased their prudence. The walls of the chateau were massive, the floors thick, the wine cellar far away, and no sound came from them to the inmates of the great hall. Indeed, in the exciting adventure that had taken place, the raiders had been completely forgot by Marteau and the others.

The conversation in the hall was not animated. The Countess Laure, womanlike, at last began to ask questions.

"Monsieur Marteau," she asked persuasively, "will you hear reason?"

"I will hear anything, mademoiselle, from you," was the instant reply.

"Think of the unhappy state of France."

"I have had reason enough to think of it to-night, mademoiselle. My father and my sister----" his voice faltered.

"I know," said the girl sympathetically, and, indeed, she was deeply grieved for the misfortunes of the faithful and devoted old man and the young girl she had loved. She waited a moment and then continued. "The Emperor is at last facing defeat. His cause is hopeless."

"He yet lives," answered the soldier softly.

"Yes, of course," said the woman. "I do not understand the military situation, but my friends----"

"Will monsieur allow me the favor of a word?" interposed the chief Russian officer courteously.

"If it is not to summon assistance you may speak," replied Marteau.

"As a soldier you know the situation as well as I," continued the Russian. "Prince Von Schwarzenberg has Napoleon in his grasp. He will hold him until he is ready to seize him, while Field-Marshal Blucher takes Paris."

"The Emperor yet lives," said Marteau, repeating his former remark with more emphasis and smiling somewhat scornfully. "It is not wise to portion the lion's skin while it covers his beating heart," he added meaningly.

"Not even the genius of your Emperor," persisted the Russian more earnestly, "will avail now, monsieur. He is lost, his cause as well. Why, this very convoy tells the story. We intercepted letters that told how pressing was its need. Your army is without arms, without food, without clothes."

"It still has its Emperor."

"Death!" cried the Russian impatiently. "Must we kill him in order to teach you a lesson?"

"You will not kill him while there is a soldier in France to interpose his body."

"Very heroic, doubtless," sneered the Russian, beginning to get angry. "But you know your cause is lost."

"And if it were?"

"Be reasonable. There are many Frenchmen with the allied armies. Your rank is----?"

"I am a Major on the Emperor's staff if you are interested to know."

"Major Marteau, I have no doubt that my interest with my Emperor, the Czar Alexander, with whom I am remotely connected--I may say I am a favorite officer in his guard--would doubtless insure you a Colonel's commission, perhaps even that of a General of Brigade, with my gracious master, or in the army of King Louis after we have replaced him on his throne if----"

"If what?"

"If you release us, restore us to our command. Permit us to send for horses to take the place of those we have killed to take the wagons of the valuable convoy to our own army."

"And you would have me abandon my Emperor?"

"For the good of France," urged the Russian meaningly.

"Will you answer me a question, monsieur?" continued the young man after a moment's deep thought.

"Certainly, if it be not treason to my master."

"Oh, you have views on treason, then," said the Frenchman adroitly and not giving the other time to answer he continued. "To what corps are you attached?"

"Count Sacken's."

"And whose division?"

"General Olsuvieff's."

"Monsieur," said the young Frenchman calmly, "it is more than probable that before to-morrow your division will be annihilated and the next day the corps of General Sacken may meet the same fate."

The Russian laughed scornfully at what seemed to him the wildest boasting.

"Are you mad?"

"Not so mad as you will be when it happens."

The Russian controlled himself with difficulty in the face of the irritating observations.

"And who will do this?" he asked, at last.

"The Emperor."

"Does he command the lightning-flash that he could hurl the thunder-bolt from Troyes?"

"Upon my word, I believe he does," laughed the Frenchman.

"This is foolish jesting, boy," broke out the Englishman. "I am a man of consideration in my own country. The lady here will bear me out. I offered you fifty pounds. I will give you five hundred if you will release us and----"

"And I offer you my--friendship," said the Countess, making a long pause before the last word.

How much of it she meant or how little no one could say. Any ruse was fair in war like this. Marteau looked at her. The color flamed to her cheek and died away. It had flamed into his cheek and died away also.

"Gentlemen," he said, "you offer me rank, money----" he paused--"friendship----" he shot a meaning glance at the young girl. He paused again.

"Well?" said the Russian.

"Speak out," said the Englishman. "Your answer, lad?"

"I refuse."

"Don't be a fool," roared Sir Gervaise bluntly.

"I refuse, I repeat," said Marteau. "While the Emperor lives I am his man. Not rank, not money, not friendship, not love itself even could move me. Enough, gentlemen," he continued imperiously as the two Russians and the Englishman all began to speak at once. "No more. Such propositions are insults."

"There is another appeal which ought to be brought to your attention, young sir," said the second Russian officer when he could be heard.

"And what is that?"

"Your life. You know that as soon as day breaks the chateau will be seized. You are a self-confessed spy. You came here wearing a Russian uniform. As soon as we are released we shall hang you as a spy. But if you release us now, on my word of honor you shall go free."

"Monsieur is a very brave man," said Marteau smiling.

"Why?"

"To threaten me with death while he is in my power. You are the only witnesses. I could make way with you all."

"You forget the Countess and the English gentleman."

"Although the Countess is the enemy of France----"

"Nay, nay, the friend," interposed the girl.

"Be it so. Although she is the enemy of the Emperor then, I cannot believe that she could condemn to death by her testimony the man who has saved her from worse than death, and as for the English gentleman----"

"Damme if I'd say a word to hurt you, if only for what you have done for her, whether you release me or not," cried Yeovil.

"You see?"

"Monsieur Jean," said the Countess, "you put me under great obligations to you."

"By saving your life, your honor, mademoiselle! I gladly----"

"By giving me your confidence," interrupted the girl, who in her secret heart was delighted at the stand the young officer had taken. She would have despised him if he had succumbed to the temptation of which she herself was part.

"I could do no less, mademoiselle," returned Marteau. "I and my forbears have served your house and known it and loved it for eight hundred years."

"I know it," answered the girl. "I value the association. I am proud of it."

"And since you know it and recognize it perhaps you will tell me how you happen to be here."

"Willingly," answered Mademoiselle Laure. "The estates are to be sold. There are deeds and papers of value in the chateau without which transactions could not be completed. I alone knew where they were. With Monsieur Yeovil, my uncle's friend and the father of----" she hesitated and then went on, "so I came to France."

"But with the invading armies----"

"There was no other way. The Czar Alexander gave me a safe conduct. A company of his guards escorted us. Sir Gervaise Yeovil was accredited to Lord Castlereagh, but with his permission he brought me here first. My uncle was too old to come. Arrived here we found the Cossacks, the wagon-train. There was a battle, a victory, pursuit. Then those villains seized us. They stole upon us unsuspecting, having murdered the sentries, and then you came."

"I see. And have you the papers?"

"They are---- Not yet, but I may take them?"

"Assuredly, so far as I am concerned," answered Marteau, "although I regret to see the old estate pass out of the hands of the ancient family."

"I regret it also, but I am powerless."

"We played together here as children," said Marteau. "My father has kept it well since. Your father died and now mine is gone----"

"And I am very sorry," answered the young woman softly.

Marteau turned away, peered out of the window and sank into gloomy silence.

CHAPTER IX

THE EMPEROR EATS AND RIDES

Sezanne was a scene of the wildest confusion that night. It was congested with troops and more and more were arriving every minute. They entered the town in fearful condition. They had been weary and ragged and naked before. Now they were in a state of extreme prostration; wet, cold, covered with mud. The roads were blocked with mired artillery, the guns were sunk into the mud to the hubs, the tired horses could no longer move them. The woods on either side were full of stragglers, many of whom had dropped down on the wet ground and slept the sleep of complete exhaustion. Some, indeed, sick and helpless, died where they lay. Everything eatable and drinkable in Sezanne had vanished as a green field before a swarm of locusts when Marmont's division had come through some hours before.

The town boasted a little square or open space in the midst. A huge fire was burning in the center of this open space. A cordon of grenadiers kept the ground about the fire clear of stragglers. Suddenly the Emperor rode into the midst. He was followed by a wet, cold, mud-spattered, bedraggled staff, all of them unutterably weary. Intense resolution blazed in the Emperor's eyes. He had had nothing to eat or drink since morning, but that ancient bodily vigor, that wonderful power of endurance, which had stood him in such good stead in days gone by, seemed to have come back to him now. He was all fire and energy and determination. So soon as his presence was known, couriers reported to him. Many of them he stopped with questions.

"The convoy of arms, provisions, powder," he snapped out to an officer of Marmont's division approaching him, "which was to meet us here. Have you seen it?"

"It has not appeared, Sire."

"Has anything been heard of it?"

"Nothing yet, your Majesty."

"Have you scouted for it, sent out parties to find it? Where is the Comte de Grouchy?"

"I come from him, Sire. He is ahead of the Duke of Ragusa's corps."

"Has he come in touch with the enemy?"

"Not yet, Sire."

"The roads?"

"Worse than those we have passed over."

"Marshal Marmont?"

"I was ordered by General Grouchy to report to him and then----"

"Well, sir?"

"He sent me back here."

"For what purpose?"

"To find you, Sire, and to say to you most respectfully from the Marshal that the roads are absolutely impassable. He has put four teams to a gun and can scarcely move them. To advance is impossible. He but awaits your order to retrace his steps."

"Retrace his steps!" shouted Napoleon, raising his voice. "Never! He must go on. Our only hope, our only chance, salvation lies in an instant advance. He knows that as well as I."

"But the guns, Sire?"

"Abandon the guns if necessary. We'll take what cannon we need from the enemy."

And that admission evidenced the force with which the Emperor held his convictions as to the present movement. Great, indeed, was the necessity which would induce Napoleon to order the abandonment of a single gun.

"But, Sire----"

"Monsieur," said Napoleon severely, "you are a young officer, although you wear the insignia of a Colonel. Know that I am not accustomed to have my commands questioned by anyone. You will return to Marshal Marmont at once. Exchange your tired horse for one of my own. I still have a fresh one, I believe. And spare him not. Tell the Duc de Ragusa that he must advance at all hazards. Advance with the guns if he can, if not then without them. Stay, as for the guns---- Where is the Mayor of the town?"

"Here, Sire," answered a plain, simple man in civilian's dress standing near.

"Are there any horses left in the countryside, monsieur?"

"Many, your Majesty, wherever the Russians have not passed."

"I thought so. Gentlemen," the Emperor turned to his staff, "ride in every direction. Take the mounted escort. Bid them scatter. Go to every village and farm. Ask my good French people to bring their horses in, to lend them to the Emperor. It is for France. I strike the last blow for them, their homes, their wives and children. Fortune smiles upon us. The enemy is delivered into our hands. They shall be liberally rewarded."

"The men are hungry," cried a voice from a dark group of officers in the background.

"They are weary," exclaimed another, under cover of the darkness.

"Who spoke?" asked the Emperor, but he did not wait for an answer, perhaps he did not care for one. "I, too, am hungry, I, your Emperor, and I am weary. I have eaten nothing and have ridden the day long. There is bread, there are guns in the Field-Marshal's army. We shall take from Blucher all that we need. Then we can rest. You hear?"

"We hear, Sire."

"Good. Whose division is yonder?"

"Mine, Sire," answered Marshal Ney, riding up and saluting.

"Ah, Prince," said Napoleon, riding over toward him. "Michael," he added familiarly as he drew nearer, "I am confident that the Prussians have no idea that we are nearer than Troyes to them. We must get forward with what we can at once and fall on them before they learn of our arrival and concentrate. We must move swiftly."

"To-morrow," suggested Ney.

"To-night."

"The conscripts of my young guard are in a state of great exhaustion and depression. If they could have the night to rest in----"

Napoleon shook his head.

"Advance with those who can march," he said decisively. "We must fall on Blucher in the morning or we are lost."

"Impossible!" ejaculated Ney.

"I banished that word from my vocabulary when I first went into Italy," said Napoleon. "Where are your troops?"

"Here, your Majesty," answered Ney, turning, pointing back to dark huddled ranks drooping over their muskets at

parade rest.

Napoleon wheeled his horse and trotted over to them. The iron hand of Ney had kept some sort of discipline and some sort of organization, but the distress and dismay of the conscripts was but too plainly evident.

"My friends," said the Emperor, raising his voice, "you are hungry----" a dull murmur of acquiescence came from the battalion--"you are weary and cold----" a louder murmur--"you are discouraged----" silence. "Some of you have no arms. You would fain rest. Well I, your Emperor, am weary, I am hungry, I am old enough to be the father of most of you and I am wet and cold. But we must forget those things. You wonder why I have marched you all the day and most of the night through the cold and the wet and the mud. The Prussians are in front of us. They are drawn out in long widely separated columns. They have no idea that we are near them. One more effort, one more march, and we shall fall upon them. We shall pierce their lines, cut them to pieces, beat them in detail; we shall seize their camps, their guns, their clothes, their food. We shall take back the plunder they have gathered as they have ravaged France. They have stolen and destroyed and murdered--you have seen it. One more march, one more battle for----" he hesitated a moment--"for me," he said with magnificent egotism and audacity. "I have not forgotten how to lead, nor you to follow. We will show them that at the great game of war we are still master players. Come, if there be one too weary to walk, he shall have his Emperor's horse and I will march afoot as I have often done for France."

He spoke with all his old force and power. The tremendous personal magnetism of the man was never more apparent. The young men of Ney's corps thrilled to the splendid appeal. There was something fascinating, alluring in the picture. They hated the Prussians. They had seen the devastated fields, the dead men and women, the ruined farms. The light from the fire played mystically about the great Emperor on his white horse. He seemed to them like a demi-god. There were a few old soldiers in the battalion. The habit of years was upon them.

"*Vive l'Empereur*," one veteran shouted.

Another caught it up and finally the whole division roared out that frightful and thrilling battle cry in unison.

"That's well," said the Emperor, a little color coming into his face. "If the lads are of this mettle, what may I expect of the old soldiers of the guard?"

"Forward! Forward!" shouted a beardless boy in one of the front ranks.

"You hear, Marshal Ney?" said Napoleon, turning to his fighting Captain. "With such soldiers as these I can go anywhere and do anything."

"Your Majesty," cried a staff officer, riding up at a gallop, "the peasants are bringing their horses in. There is a section of country to the eastward which has not yet been ridden over by the enemy."

"Good," said the Emperor. "As fast as they come up dispatch them to Marmont. You will find me there by the fire in the square for the next hour. Meanwhile I want the next brigade of horse that reaches Sezanne to be directed to scout in the direction of Aumenier for that missing wagon-train for which we----"

There was a sudden confusion on the edge of the line. The grenadiers forming a circle around the fire had caught a man wearing a Russian greatcoat and were dragging him into the light.

"What's this? *Mon Dieu*!" exclaimed Napoleon, recognizing the green uniform which he had seen on many a battlefield. "A Russian! Here!"

"A soldier of France, Sire," came the astonishing answer in excellent French from the supposed prisoner.

At this amazing remark in their own tongue the bewildered grenadiers on guard released him. He tore off the green cap and dashed it to the ground.

"Give me a shako. Let me feel the bearskin of the guard again," he cried impetuously, as his hands ripped open his overcoat, disclosing his uniform. "I am a grenadier of the line, Sire."

Napoleon peered down at him.

"Ah," he said, "I know you. You are called----"

"Bal-Arret, your Majesty."

"Exactly. Have you stopped any more this time?"

"There is one in my left arm. Your guards hurt when they grasped it. But it is nothing. I didn't come here to speak of bullets, but of----"

"What?"

"The Russians, the Prussians."

"Where did you get that coat and cap?"

"I rode with Jean Marteau," answered the grenadier, greatly excited.

"What of him? Is he alive?"

"I think so."

"Did you leave him?"

"I did, Sir."

"And why?"

"To bring you news."

"Of Marshal Blucher's armies?"

The grenadier nodded his head.

"What of them? Quick man, your tidings? Have you been among them?"

"All day long."

"Where are they?"

"General Yorck with his men is at Etampes."

"And Macdonald?"

"Fighting a rearguard action beyond Chateau-Thierry."

"On what side of the Mame?"

"The north side, Sir. Right at La Ferte-sous-Jouarre."

"What else?"

"Sacken's Russians are advancing along the main road through Montmirail toward Paris. Olusuvieff's Russian division is at Champaubert."

"And where are Blucher and Wittgenstein and Wrede?"

"Major Marteau will have to tell you that, Sir. He went that way."

"You separated?"

"Yes, Sir."

"You were to meet somewhere?"

"At the Chateau d'Aumenier."

"Did you go there?"

"I did, Sir."

"And you found?"

"The ground around the chateau filled with wagons."

"A train?"

"Of arms, clothing, ammunition, everything the army lacks."

"What was it doing there?"

"There had been a battle. Horses and men were slain; Frenchmen, Cossacks, Russians. I pillaged one wagon," continued the grenadier.

He drew forth from the pocket of the coat a bottle and a handful of hard bread, together with what remained of the roast pig.

"Will you share your meal with a brother soldier?" asked the Emperor, who was ordinarily the most fastidious of mortals, but who could on occasion assume the manner of the rudest private soldier.

"Gladly," said the proud and delighted grenadier, handing the bottle, the bread and the meat to Napoleon, who took them and drank and ate rapidly as he continued to question amid the approving murmurs of the soldiers, who were so delighted to see their Emperor eat like a common man that they quite forgot their own hunger.

"What were the wagons doing there unguarded?"

"I think the men who captured the train were pursuing its guard. Just as I approached the chateau they came riding back. I remained quiet, watching them ride up to the door of the house, which they found barred apparently, for I could hear them beat on it with the butts of their sabers and pistols. They built a fire and suddenly I heard shots. By the light I could see Russians falling. It came into my mind that Major Marteau had seized the castle and was holding it."

"Alone?"

"One soldier of yours, Sire, ought to be able to hold his own against a thousand Russians, especially inside a castle wall."

"And what did you then?"

"I made ready my pistol, Sire, and when I saw a man climbing the wall to get in an open window I shot him."

"And then?"

"They ran after me, fired at me but I escaped in the darkness."

"You ran?"

"Because I knew that you must have the news and as Marteau was there it was necessary for me to bring it."

"You have done well," said the Emperor in great satisfaction. "I thank you for your tidings and your meal. I have never tasted a better. Do you wish to go to the rear?"

"For a scratch in the arm?" asked old Bullet-Stopper scornfully. "I, who have carried balls in my breast and have some there now?"

"I like your spirit," said the Emperor, "and I will----"

At this instant a staff officer rode up.

"General Maurice's cavalry is just arriving, Sire," he said.

"Good," said the Emperor. "The brave light-horseman! My sword hand! I will ride with him myself. Tell the Comte de Vivonne to lead his division toward Aumenier, I will join him at once." He turned to those of his staff who remained in the square. "Remain here, gentlemen. Tell the arriving troops that at daybreak we shall beat the Russians at

Champaubert. Bid them hasten if they would take part in the victory and the plunder. The rest will be easy."

"And you, Sire?"

"I ride with the cavalry brigade to Aumenier. Tell the men that the wagon-train has arrived. We shall seize it. Food, arms, will be distributed in the morning. Is that you, Maurice?" he continued, as a gallant young general officer attended by a few aides rode up.

"At your service, Sire," answered a gay voice.

"Your cavalry?"

"Weary but ready to follow the Emperor anywhere."

"Forward, then. There is food and drink at the end of our ride. It is but a few miles to Aumenier."

"May I have a horse and go with you, Sire?" asked the old grenadier.

"Assuredly. See that he gets one and a Cross of the Legion of Honor, too. Come, gentlemen," continued the Emperor, putting spurs to his tired horse.

CHAPTER X

HOW MARTEAU WON THE CROSS

For a long time the besiegers had given little evidence of their presence. Through the loop-holes in the shutters fires could be seen burning, figures coming and going. They were busy about something, but just what was not apparent. They had been unmolested by the defenders. Marteau had but three pistols and therefore three shots left. Pierre, upstairs, had but one. To kill one or two more Russians would not have bettered their condition. The pistols should be saved for a final emergency. He had called up to Pierre and had cautioned him. There was nothing to do but to wait.

From time to time the silence was broken by snatches of conversation. As, for instance, the Countess Laure, observing that Marteau wore upon his breast the Grand Cross of the Legion of Honor, thus began,

"You wear a great decoration for a simple----" She stopped awkwardly.

"For a simple peasant you were about to say, mademoiselle," answered Marteau, smiling with a little touch of scorn. "In France to-day even a simple peasant may deserve and receive the favor of the Emperor."

"I am sure that you are worthy of whatever distinction you may have achieved, monsieur," said the Countess gently, grieved at her lack of consideration and anxious to make amends. "And as one who takes pride in all associated with her ancient house will you tell me how you got that?"

"It was at Leipsic."

"Ah, we beat you there," said one Russian meaningly.

"Yes," said Marteau. "Perhaps after having seen your backs so many times we could afford to turn ours upon you once."

"I was there," said the other Russian triumphantly.

"Were you also at Friedland, at Eylau, at Borodino, at----" began Marteau angrily.

"Gentlemen!" said the Countess.

"Forgive, mademoiselle," said the Frenchman quickly. "I, at least, will not fight our battles over in the presence of a woman."

"But the cross?"

"It was nothing. I saved an eagle. The Emperor bestowed it on me."

"Tell me about it."

"I was on the bridge at Leipsic when it was blown up by that fatal mistake. The Port-Aigle was torn to pieces. The Colonel seized the Eagle as it fell from his hand. I was next to him--afoot. A storm of bullets swept over the river. As the Colonel on his horse was pushed over the parapet by the flying fugitives a shot struck him. He had just strength enough to gasp out, 'Save the Eagle' as he was swept away. I was lucky enough to catch the staff--a bullet had broken it--I seized the upper half with the Eagle and the flag which had almost been shot to pieces during the battle--the Fifth-of-the-Line had done its full duty that day--and I swam with it toward the bank. Really, mademoiselle, any soldier would have done as well. I only happened to be there."

"Go on, monsieur, I wish to hear everything."

"At your pleasure, then," said Marteau reluctantly, continuing his story.

"The river was filled with men and horses. Marshal Poniatowski was near me. He had been wounded, and guided his swimming horse with his left hand. The current was swift. We were swept down the stream. A cavalryman next to me was shot from his horse. He fell over upon me. I was forced under water a moment. Another horse, swimming frantically, struck my shoulder with his hoof, fortunately it was the left one. My arm was broken. I seized the tatters of the flag in my teeth--you know I am an expert swimmer, mademoiselle?"

"I know it," answered the girl, her eyes gleaming at the recital. "Have you forgot the day when, disregarding your warnings, I fell into the river and was swept away and how you plunged in and brought me to the shore and never told my father?"

"I have not forgot," said the young officer simply, "but it was not for me to remind you."

"And I have not forgot, either. But continue the story," said the young Countess, her eyes shining, her breath coming quicker, as she listened to the gallant tale so modestly set forth.

"With my right arm I swam as best I could. There was a horse nearby which had lost his rider. I grasped the saddle horn. Somehow I managed to reach the shore with the Eagle. I clambered up the bank, slippery with water and with blood, mademoiselle. The Russians were firing at us from the town. A bullet struck me."

"Where?"

"I am ashamed to say, in the back," said the soldier, flushing at the recollection. "But if I had stood up and faced them the Eagle would have been lost."

The Russian laughed scornfully.

"In the back," he cried meaningly, "a fine place for a soldier!"

"Shame," said the Countess quickly.

"If I had faced them," returned the French soldier simply, "I should have been shot in the breast and killed, perhaps, but I should have lost the Eagle. It was my business to save the Eagle at all hazards, even though I should be branded with cowardice for having done so," he went on hotly.

"I understand," said the Countess. "I, who have known you from a child, know that you are a brave man, monsieur. Proceed."

"I staggered up the bank. Fortune had brought me to the place where the Emperor stood watching. There were staff officers about him. Oh, very few. The slaughter had been dreadful, the confusion was inconceivable, mademoiselle. They made way for me. How well I remember the whole scene," continued the young Frenchman. "The Emperor stood a little apart, his face pale, his head bent. He was frowning and whistling."

"Whistling! Damme," burst out Sir Gervaise Yeovil, deeply interested in the unpretentious account of so heroic a deed. "What was he whistling?"

"Malbrook-s'en-va-t'en-guerre."

"By gad," roared the Englishman. "Marlborough beat you. Just wait until we come in touch with you."

"There was no Napoleon there," observed Marteau simply, as if that were adequate answer.

"Napoleon or no Napoleon, wait until Wellington----"

"We shall wait."

"Pardon, Monsieur Yeovil," said the Countess, "will you not allow Monsieur Marteau to proceed?"

"There is little more to tell, mademoiselle. The Emperor saw me come up. I was wet, my arm hung useless, the bullet had gone through my body. There was blood on my uniform coat. I thought that I was dying, that my end was at hand. My strength was ebbing. I concentrated all my will and power. Holding the Eagle, I lifted it up in salute. 'What have we here?' cried the Emperor, fixing his glance upon me. 'Lieutenant Marteau,' I answered. His voice came to me as in a dream and my own voice sounded far away. 'Of what regiment?' 'The Fifth-of-the-Line, Sire.' 'You have saved the Eagle.' 'Yes, Sire,' I replied. And then consciousness left me. As I fell I heard the Emperor say, 'See that he gets the Legion of Honor if he survives.' People caught me in their arms. When I woke up I was in France. Here, at Aumenier, in my father's house."

Young Marteau did not add to his story that, as he fell, he heard the Emperor, deeply moved, exclaim:

"With such men what resources does not France possess?"

"And did the Emperor give you the cross?" eagerly asked the girl.

"It was forgot until a few days since. When I recovered I rejoined the regiment. To take the duty of an officer suddenly ill I happened to be stationed on service near the Emperor at Nogent. When others were urging him to make terms, I, though a young soldier, ventured to express myself to the contrary."

"And then?"

"His Majesty pardoned the liberty, recognized me, gave me his own cross, made me a Major on his staff."

"And the Eagle?"

"It is still carried at the head of what remains of the Fifth-of-the-Line," said the young man proudly.

"When we have taken your Emperor we will do away with those Eagles, and after we restore her rightful king to France we shall give her back her ancient flag of golden lilies," said the Russian.

"Precisely," said Marteau sharply. "When you have taken the Emperor you may do all that. The men who have made France so great under him will care little what you do, monsieur, under such circumstances."

"And why will they be so indifferent, Monsieur Jean?" asked the Countess curiously.

"They will be dead, mademoiselle, and their Emperor, too, unless God preserve his life for some future use."

"Happy," said the young girl, "is the man who can inspire such devotion, monsieur. Although I have been trained differently I think that----"

What the Countess thought was never said for at that instant the door at the farther end of the great room was thrown open suddenly with a violent crash, and into the apartment came crowding the score of villains and scoundrels who had been imprisoned below stairs. They had managed to break out in some way and had returned to the great hall to seize again their captives and to wreak their vengeance upon their betrayer. They had got at the wine and were inflamed with drink as well as revenge and savage passion. They had realized, of course, that some enemies were outside but they had not clearly grasped the situation. All they thought of at the time were the people in the great hall. They came crowding through the big doorway, several of them handling pistols and all of them shouting savage and fearsome cries of revenge and triumph.

Instantly the pistols were presented, the triggers pressed and half a dozen bullets swept through the room. Marteau had seen the first movement of the door. He had divined what had happened. Before the pistols had been

leveled he was by the side of the Countess. The table at which she sat was a huge and heavy one. With one movement he hurled her, chair and all, to the floor, with the other he threw the table on its side in front of her. One of the bullets grazed his cheek, the others swept harmlessly through the room. He seized from another table two of his remaining pistols and discharged them squarely into the face of the crowding mass at the other end of the room at point-blank range. The sounds of the shots still echoed when he cried out:

"The knife, Countess. Cut the bonds of the prisoners. We must fight here for our lives and your honor."

The Countess Laure was quick to understand.

"You are safe now. They have no more shots. Hasten," he urged, reaching down a hand and assisting her to her feet.

He clutched the barrels of his pistols thereafter and hurled them directly into the faces of the infuriated men. Five of them were down and his prompt action had given the people in the room a little respite.

"Gentlemen," cried Marteau, sweeping out his sword and stepping into the open space between the prisoners and the overturned table on one hand and the renegades on the other, "quick, take your swords for the honor of the Countess and for your lives."

The man who led the renegades had some idea of military tactics. He spoke a few sharp words and half a dozen of them backed out of the room, entered the outer hall and ran around to the door on the side of the apartment which gave access to the great hall. The little band of defenders retreated into a corner near the fireplace, which was raised a step or two above the floor of the room.

Meanwhile Laure had cut the lashings of the Russians, the Cossacks, and the Englishman. They staggered to their feet numb from their long bondage, but inspired by the frightful imminence of their peril they seized their swords and presented a bold front to the two-sided enemy. There was one pistol left charged. Marteau handed that to the girl.

"The last shot, mademoiselle," he said meaningly, "for yourself if----"

"I understand."

"If you could only get to the door," growled the Russian commander, "my men outside would make short work of--"

"It is impossible until we have dealt with these villains," said Marteau. "On guard!" he cried as the marauders suddenly leaped forward.

The big Englishman, burly, tremendously powerful for all his advancing years, dropped his sword for a moment, picked up one of the heavy oak chairs and hurled it full into the face of the larger body at the further end of the room. One stumbled over it, two others fell. The next moment both parties were upon the little group. In their haste, in their drunken excitement, the marauders had not thought to recharge their pistols. With swords, scythes and clubs they fell on the six men. Their numbers worked to their disadvantage. Three of the men surrounding the woman, the Frenchman and the two Russian guardsmen, were accomplished swordsmen. The Cossacks were not to be disdained in rough-and-tumble fighting and the Englishman was a valiant ally. Their racial antagonisms were forgot in their common danger and the deadly peril of the woman.

The swords of the soldiers flashed as they thrust and parried. The Cossacks, less skillful, strove to beat down the attackers by sweeping slashes--not the best method for such close fighting. One Cossack was pierced through the breast by a thrust from a renegade and another was cut from his neck almost to his heart by a blow from a scythe. One of the Russian officers was wounded, fell to his knees and was dispatched. The Englishman was hit by a billet of wood and dazed. Marteau and the other Russian were still unharmed. But it was going hard with them. In fact, a fierce blow on his blade from a bludgeon shivered the weapon of the Frenchman. A sword was aimed at his heart. There was a blinding flash, a detonation, and the man who held it staggered back. The Countess, the last pistol almost touching the man's body, had pulled the trigger. Marteau seized the sword of the man who had menaced him. The next instant the chateau was shaken by a terrific roar. The Russians outside having constructed a rude bomb had blown up the door.

For a second the combat ceased. The hall was full of smoke. From outside came shots, shrieks, cries, loud curses and groans, cheers, French and Russian voices, the galloping of horses, words of command. The French were there.

"To me," shouted Marteau at the top of his voice. "France!"

The first to heed the call was young Pierre. He descended the hall, watched the conflict a moment and, having possessed himself of a club, battered down the man nearest him, unsuspecting an attack from the rear, then ranged himself by the side of the surviving Russian and the Frenchman. He did not come through scathless, however, for one of the renegades cut him fiercely as he passed. He stood erect by an effort of will but it was evident he could now add little to the defense. The Russian took the pistol from his hand. The next second the great hall was filled with shouting figures of soldiers. Into the smoke and confusion of the room came Napoleon.

CHAPTER XI

AN EMPEROR AND A GENTLEMAN

"The Emperor!" cried Marteau.

The Russian officer recognized Napoleon as quickly as the other. The Emperor advanced, the soldiers crowding after threw themselves upon the renegades immediately, while the Emperor strode forward alone. The young Russian noble was a quicker witted man than his countrymen ordinarily were. He saw a chance to end everything then and there, to do his country a great service, although his life would be forfeited instantly in the doing of it.

"My chance," he shouted, raising Pierre's pistol.

The shot was an easy one. It was impossible to miss. Marteau had stepped forward. The thrill in the tones of the man's voice attracted his attention. One glance and he saw all. He threw himself in front of the Emperor just as the Russian pressed the trigger. At the same moment the Countess Laure, who stood nearest him, struck up the Russian's arm. The bullet buried itself in the ceiling above.

"Thank God!" cried Marteau as the sound died away and he saw the Emperor standing unharmed.

Napoleon's keen eye had seen everything.

"It is this lady," said he gracefully, "to whom my safety is due. And I am not unmindful that you interposed your own body between the bullet and your Emperor."

"Your Majesty," cried Marteau, now that his Emperor was safe, fain to discharge his duty, "I have tidings of the utmost importance. I have held this chateau and detained this convoy the Russians had captured. It contains powder, food, guns----"

"I know," said the Emperor. "It comes in the nick of time."

"And I have to report, Sire, that the corps of Wittgenstein, Wrede and of the Field-Marshal Blucher, himself, are strung out at long intervals to the eastward of Champaubert. They have no idea of your proximity."

"Are the divisions in supporting distance of one another?"

"No, Sire. Olsuvieff's division lies isolated at Champaubert. As to the divisions of Sacken and Yorck I think----"

"I have already received information concerning them," said the Emperor, "from your friend, Bullet-Stopper. He should be here."

"I am here, your Majesty," roared the grenadier, stepping forward, "and saving your Imperial Presence I am glad to see the lad. It was I," continued the grenadier, addressing Marteau and presuming on the familiarity with which Napoleon sometimes treated his men, "that fired the shot that brought the man down from the window."

"And that shot saved us," said young Marteau. "This young peasant here----" he bent over Pierre--"he is not dead, Sire, but sorely wounded--he kept them out up there while we held the room here."

"But these?" asked Napoleon, looking at the prisoners.

"Renegades who had taken advantage of the absence of the Russians pursuing the escort to the wagon-train to

seize the castle."

"Why did you not impress them for the defense thereof?" asked the Emperor. "They were French undoubtedly----"

"I found them fighting against us."

Rapidly and in few words Marteau told the story of the night, touching lightly upon his own part, but the Emperor was soldier enough to read between the words of the narration and reconstruct the scene instantly. He turned to one of his officers.

"Take those scoundrels out. Put them up against the wall and shoot them out of hand. They disgrace the name of France. Bid the surgeons of the command come here to look to the wounded."

"They are past hope, except the French boy, your Majesty," said Yeovil, who having recovered his own consciousness speedily had been examining them meanwhile. "I have some skill in wounds. One Cossack is already dead. It would be a mercy to put that other out of his misery with that horrible scythe slash."

"The Russian officer?"

"Gone, too."

"And who are you?"

"I am a barrister," answered the Englishman in bad but comprehensible French.

"A man of the law. You look it not," said the Emperor, smiling faintly.

"Necessity makes us all resort to the sword," said Sir Gervaise, looking at his bloody blade, for he had fought valiantly with the rest and would have been killed but he had been knocked senseless with that billet of wood which had hit him on the head and felled him to the floor.

"You are, by your language, an Englishman."

"I am, and proud of it."

"The English," said Napoleon slowly, "have been my bitterest enemies."

"Pardon, Sire," said the Russian bluntly, "we children of the white Czar will dispute that honor with them."

"And you sought to kill me?" said the Emperor, turning upon the other. "You are a brave man," he added.

"And I would have done so but for----"

"Bah!" interrupted Napoleon contemptuously. "The bullet is not molded that is destined for me. My career is not to be cut short by the hand of any young boy who wears the uniform of the Russian guard. Silence, monsieur! Take him prisoner. See that he be kept under close guard. When we have taken Olsuvieff's division to-morrow and then Sacken's there will be many of his comrades to bear him company to Paris. Did any of the men outside escape?"

"No, Sire," answered General Maurice, entering the room just in time to hear the question. "The wood around the chateau was completely filled with my men. Those we have not killed here we have taken prisoner. Most of them were shot down as they strove to break through."

"That is well," said the Emperor.

"And the convoy?" asked General Maurice.

"Detach a regiment to escort it back to Sezanne. Let it be distributed to the regiments and divisions as they arrive."

"And those who have gone on ahead?"

"Their arms, equipment and provisions are in the hands of the Prussians. We shall march immediately. As for you,

mademoiselle, what is your name?"

"I am the Comtesse Laure d'Aumenier."

"H'm, the daughter of the Comte Robert d'Aumenier, who made his submission to the Empire and received back his estates, I believe?"

"The same, Sire."

"Where is he?"

"Dead, Sire, these two years."

"And you?"

"I went to my uncle in England."

"To the enemy!" exclaimed Napoleon sharply.

"To the enemy," answered the Countess, looking at him courageously.

"And you came back for what purpose?"

"The estates are to be sold. There were certain papers of which I alone knew the hiding place. There was no way for me to reach them save by the courtesy of the Czar Alexander. He sent me to Field-Marshal Blucher with instructions to provide me with an escort to this chateau. The Field-Marshal did so, and the rest you know."

"And you propose to sell estates that have been in the hands of the family for so long a period? It seems to me that I visited them once when I was a military student at Brienne. Was not your uncle there at the time, an officer in command?"

"I have heard him say so."

"I remember him very well now."

"And he you, your Majesty."

"And he intends now to sell the estates?"

"He did, Sire, but now that there is a possibility of the re--of the----"

"The return of the Bourbons," said Napoleon, divining her thought as the Countess paused in confusion, "There is no possibility of that, mademoiselle. In three weeks the armies opposing me will have been hurled back beyond the frontier. Your family has forfeited its rights to any consideration at my hands. Your uncle is an *emigre* who has never made his submission. I find you, a Frenchwoman, in the company of my enemies. Your estates are forfeited. Major Marteau, I make you Comte d'Aumenier. The domains are yours."

"I accept them, your Majesty."

"What! Is it possible----" cried the Countess Laure, her face flaming.

"Silence, mademoiselle. By the laws of war I could have you shot. It would be a fine example. No Frenchman, however high in rank and station, no Frenchwoman, however young or beautiful, can fight against me and France with impunity. Have you anything to say why I should not mete out to you this well-deserved punishment?"

"Nothing," said the young woman with proud disdain. "The revolution has taken the lives of many of my people. I am not better than they. You are the very spirit of the revolution incarnate, Sire, and----"

"Your Majesty," interposed General Maurice.

"Well, sir?" said Napoleon.

General Maurice, a famous light horseman, otherwise known as the Count de Vivonne, was an old friend and a

devoted follower of the Emperor. He had interfered before on occasion between Napoleon and his victims. He knew the Emperor thoroughly and loved him. He realized that it was his time to interpose, or someone's, and he had intuition enough to suspect that his interposition would be most welcome, that indeed Napoleon was playing, as he sometimes loved to do, a little comedy. With a wave of his hand the general checked Marteau, whom he knew slightly, who had sprung forward to protest to the Emperor at the words of the woman he loved.

"Allow me a word, Sire," asked the General with that exquisite mixture of courtesy, deference and resolution which characterized his intercourse with the Emperor.

"I am always glad to hear from you, my good Maurice," said the Emperor familiarly. "What have you to say?"

"This young woman is no traitor to you or to France, Sire, however strange her position."

"How do you make that out?" asked the Emperor, the flickering of a smile playing about his lips.

"It was her hand that struck up the Russian's pistol so that the bullet went there," the General of cavalry pointed upward a moment and then his hand fell until his index finger was trained upon the Emperor's heart, "instead of there," he added meaningly.

"Very good," said the Emperor graciously. "But had she not struck up that hand it was in Marteau's heart that the bullet would have lodged, not in mine, if I remember rightly."

"And if that gives me a claim, Sire, to your consideration----"

"Have I not rewarded you enough," asked the Emperor, "in adding the official stamp of a patent to the nobility of heart which is already yours and by giving you the forfeited lands of Aumenier to boot?"

"And I would give them all for the safety of the lady yonder, whose family mine have served for eight hundred years, with whom I played when a boy, and be content to follow your Majesty as the simple soldier I have always been."

"Brave heart and true," said the Emperor, touched. "Mademoiselle, you cannot go back to Blucher. Within two days his army will be no more. I will give you a safe conduct. You can remain here for the night. Couriers will be dispatched to Troyes and to Paris under escort in the morning. They will take you there. You have friends there, I presume?"

"Many."

"You can remain there or, if opportunity arises, I will give orders to have you safely conducted so you can go back to England."

"And me, Sire?" growled out Sir Gervaise Yeovil.

The Emperor laughed.

"I am too good a soldier to fight with men of the law," he said. "You may go with your protegee and share her fortunes."

"I thank your Majesty," said the Englishman, touched in his blunt nature by this extraordinary magnanimity. "I will report your consideration to my king and his people and----"

"And say to them that I long for the moment when I can measure swords with the Duke of Wellington."

"And may that moment come speedily," returned Sir Gervaise.

"As for the rest," said the Emperor, turning away in high good humor, "Marteau, you have been continuously on service for two days and two nights and you are wounded----"

"It is nothing."

"Remain here with old Bullet-Stopper, who, true to his name, has had another touch of the enemy's lead. General Maurice, detail a score of the weakest of your command, those slightly wounded, to whom a night's rest would be useful. They shall remain here until the courier stops for the lady and her English friend, and then under Marteau's

command rejoin me in the morning."

"Very good, Sire," said General Maurice, turning away.

"I thank your Majesty," said Marteau, "for all you have done for me, and for the Comtesse d'Aumenier."

"And I thank the Emperor also," said the young woman, smiling at him. "Your Majesty's generosity almost wins me to an imperial allegiance."

Napoleon laughed.

"Not even the Emperor," he said proudly, "is as black as he is painted by traitors and the English, Mademoiselle!" he bowed abruptly but not ungracefully. "Come, gentlemen," he said, turning on his heel, "we must march."

CHAPTER XII

AN ALLIANCE DECLINED

As the Emperor left the room, followed by the officers and men, a little silence fell over the three people remaining therein.

"Monsieur le Comte d'Aumenier!" exclaimed the Countess Laure, wonder, derision and disdain in her voice. "Your chateau, your domain!"

She looked about the great hall and laughed scornfully. Young Marteau turned crimson. He threw up his head proudly.

"Mademoiselle----" he began sternly, his voice full of indignant protest and resentment.

"Don't be too hard on the lad, Countess," interposed the Englishman, his interest aroused. "By gad, he saved your honor, your life, and----"

"And, if I mistake not, I repaid the obligation by saving his life also, sir."

"And I recognize it, and am grateful, mademoiselle."

"I am ordered to report to you, sir," said a young man, coming into the room followed by a file of dismounted soldiers, and relieving a situation growing most tense.

"Very good," said Marteau, devoutly thankful for the interruption. "You will dispose your men so as to guard the approaches of the chateau at every hand. You will keep a strict lookout, and you will awaken me at dawn. I think there is nothing to be apprehended from the enemy. The advance of the Emperor will have cleared all this section of even wandering troops of Cossacks by this time, but there are masterless men abroad."

"I shall know how to deal with them," said the young officer, saluting.

"You will also send men to remove these dead bodies and clear up this room. Take this poor lad"--pointing to Pierre--"and see that he is cared for. You will find a place for him upstairs. Your regimental surgeon----"

"Is attending to the wounded. I will see that the boy gets every care, sir."

"And Bal-Arret?"

"His arm is dressed, and he is the admiration of the camp-fire."

"I suppose so."

"Any other orders, Major?"

"None; you may go."

"Mademoiselle," said Marteau, facing the Countess as the officer turned away, his men taking the dead bodies and the wounded peasant with them, "you wrong me terribly."

"By saving your life, pray?" she asked contemptuously.

"By--by--your----" he faltered and stopped.

"In what way, Monsieur le Comte?" interrupted the young woman, who knew very well what the young man meant.

In her irritating use of his new-found title, and in the way in which it fell from her lips, she cut him like a whip-lash, and she did it deliberately, too--he, the Count, forsooth!

"Call me Marteau," he protested, stepping toward her, at which she fell back a little. "Or, better still, as when I was a boy, your faithful follower, Jean."

"If the Emperor has the power, he has made you a Count; if he has not, you are not."

"What the Emperor makes me is of little consequence between us, mademoiselle. It is what I am that counts."

"And you remain, then, just Jean Marteau, of the loyal Marteaux?"

"One does not wipe out the devotion of years in a moment. My father served yours, your grandfather, your uncle, your father. I am still"--he threw up his head proudly as he made the confession--"your man."

"But the title----"

"What is a title? Your uncle is in England. He does not purpose to come back to France unless he whom he calls his rightful king again rules the land. Should that come to be, my poor patent of nobility would not be worth the parchment upon which it was engrossed."

"And the lands?"

"In any case I would but hold them in trust for the Marquis----"

"My uncle is old, childless. I am the last of the long line."

"Then I will hold them for you, mademoiselle. They are yours. When this war is over, and France is at peace once more, I will take my father's place and keep them for you."

"I could not accept such a sacrifice."

"It would be no sacrifice."

"I repeat, I cannot consent to be under such obligation, even to you."

"There is a way----" began the young Frenchman softly, shooting a meaning glance at the young woman.

"I do not understand," she faltered.

"I am peasant born," admitted Marteau, "but, though no gentle blood flows through my veins, my family, I think, is as old as your own."

"It is so," agreed the Countess, trembling as she began to catch the meaning. "Oh, monsieur, stop."

"As there has never a d'Aumenier failed to hold the chateau so there has never failed a Marteau to follow him," went on the young man, unheeding her protest.

"I care as little for distinctions of rank as any demoiselle of old France, perhaps, but----"

"Mademoiselle is right. As for myself, I am a republican at heart, although I follow the Emperor. I, too, care little for the distinctions of rank, for titles, yet I have earned a title in the service of the Emperor. Through him, even humble men

rise high and go far. Will you----"

"Monsieur, you must not go on!" cried the girl, "thrusting out her hand, as if to check him.

"Pardon," said the young Frenchman resolutely. "Having gone thus far I must go further. Humble as I am, obscure though I be, I have dared to raise my eyes to heaven--to you, mademoiselle. In my boyhood days you honored me with your friendship, your companionship. I have made something of myself. If mademoiselle would only deign to---- It is impossible that she should love me--it would be an ineffable condescension--but is there not some merit in the thought that the last survivors of the two lines should unite to----"

"Impossible!" cried the Countess, her face flushing. "My uncle would never consent. In my veins is the oldest, the noblest blood of France. Even I could not----"

"Be it so," said Marteau, paling, but standing very erect. "It is, of course, impossible. There is not honor enough or merit enough in the world," he went on bitterly, "to obliterate the difference in station between us. The revolution, after all, changed little. Keep the title, keep the estates, mademoiselle, I want them not," continued the young soldier bitterly. "Having aspired to you, do you think these are compensations?"

"You saved my life," said the girl falteringly.

"It was nothing. You did as much for me."

"And my honor," she added.

"I ask no reward."

"By gad!" said Yeovil at this juncture, "I'm damned if I see how you can withstand him. He is a gallant lad. He has fought bravely and he has pleaded nobly. You may not win the Countess--as a matter of fact she is pledged to my son--but you deserve her. I've never been able to understand any kind of women, much less Frenchwomen, saving your presence, mademoiselle. Base-born you may be, Major Marteau, but I know a gentleman when I see him, I flatter myself, and, damme, young man, here's my hand. I can understand your Emperor better since he can inspire the devotion of men like you."

The two men clasped hands. The Countess looked on. She stepped softly nearer to them. She laid her hand on Marteau's shoulder.

"Monsieur--Jean," she said, and there was a long pause between the two words, "I would that I could grant your request, but it is--you see--you know I cannot. I am betrothed to Captain Yeovil, with my uncle's consent, of course. I am a very unhappy woman," she ended, although just what she meant by that last sentence she hardly knew.

"And this Captain Yeovil, he is a soldier?" asked Marteau.

"Under Wellington," answered the father.

"Now may God grant that I may meet him!"

"You'll find him a gallant officer," answered the sturdy old Englishman proudly.

"When I think of his father I know that to be true," was the polite rejoinder.

The little Countess sank down on the chair, buried her face in her hands and burst into tears.

"Well, of all the----" began the Englishman, but the Frenchman checked him.

"Mademoiselle," he said softly, "were every tear a diamond they could not make for me so precious a diadem as they do when I think that you weep for me. I wish you joy with your English captain. I am your humble servant ever."

And Laure d'Aumenier felt very much comforted by those words. It was absurd, inconceivable, impossible, of course, and yet no handsomer, braver, truer, more considerate gentleman had ever crossed her horizon than this descendant of an ancient line of self-respecting, honorable yeomen. She contrasted him with Captain Yeovil, and the contrast was not to Marteau's disadvantage! No, decidedly not!

CHAPTER XIII

THE THUNDERBOLT STROKE

On the tenth of February, 1814, for the first time in many days, the sun shone brightly. Nevertheless there was little change in the temperature; the thaw still prevailed. The sun's heat was not great enough to dry the roads, nor was the weather sufficiently cold to freeze them. As the Emperor wrote to his brother, with scarcely any exaggeration, there was still six feet of mud on highways and by-paths.

Napoleon, by rapid marching at the head of Maurice's Squadrons d'Elite, mounted grenadiers, chasseurs, hussars and dragoons, had easily attained a position in front of the van of the army commanded by Marmont, which had rested a few hours at St. Prix, where the road crossed the Petit Morin on a bridge. His requisition on the peasantry had been honored, and great numbers of fresh, vigorous draft horses had been brought in from all sides. There was not much speed to be got out of these farm animals, to be sure, but they were of prodigious strength. The ordinary gun teams were relieved, and numbers of these plow-horses attached to the limbers pulled the precious artillery steadily toward the enemy.

Scouts had discovered the fact that Olsuvieff's division was preparing breakfast on the low plateau upon which was situated the village of Champaubert, which had been observed by Marteau and Bal-Arret. Napoleon reconnoitered the place in person from the edge of the wood. Nansouty's cavalry had earlier driven some Russian skirmishers out of Baye, but Olsuvieff apparently had no conception of the fact that the whole French army was hard by, and he had contented himself with sending out a few scouts, who, unfortunately for him, scouted in the wrong direction.

While waiting for the infantry under Marmont to come up, Napoleon sent Nansouty's cavalry around to the left to head off Olsuvieff's advance and interpose between him and the rear guard of Sacken's division. Even the noise of the little battle--for the skirmish was a hot one--a mile down the road, did not apprise the Russian of his danger, and it was not until the long columns of the French came out of the wood and deployed and until the guns were hauled into the clearing and wheeled into action, that he awoke to the fact that an army was upon him and he would have to fight for his life.

With his unerring genius Napoleon had struck at the key position, the very center of Blucher's long drawn-out line. With but thirty thousand men attacking eighty thousand he had so maneuvered as to be in overwhelming force at the point of contact! In other words, he had got there first with the most men. Blucher's army was separated into detachments and stretched out over forty miles of roads.

Olsuvieff's division comprised five thousand men with twenty guns. At first Napoleon could bring against him not many more than that number of men and guns, to which must be added Nansouty's small cavalry division. And Olsuvieff, with all the advantages of the position, made a magnificent defense. As a defensive fighter the stubborn Russian took a back seat for no soldier in Europe. But the most determined resistance, the most magnificent courage, could not avail against overwhelming numbers, especially directed and led by Napoleon in person, for with every hour the numbers of the assailants were increased by the arrival of fresh troops, while with every hour the defense grew weaker through casualties.

Olsuvieff might have surrendered with honor at midday, but he was a stubborn soldier, and he realized, moreover, that it was his duty to hold Napoleon as long as possible. Even the most indifferent commander could not fail to see the danger to Blucher's isolated corps. Couriers broke through to the east to Sacken and Yorck, who together had over thirty-five thousand men under their command, and to the west to Blucher, with as many more men, telling all these commanders of the extreme peril of the center and of the frightfully dangerous situation in which their carelessness and the ability of their great enemy had involved them. The noise of the firing, too, was carried far and wide over the broad open fields and cultivated farms of the rolling prairie of Champagne.

Blucher, however, could not credit the intelligence. He believed it impossible for Napoleon to have escaped from Schwarzenberg. He could not conceive that Napoleon would leave the Austrians unopposed to march to Paris if they would. He could not think that even Napoleon would venture to attack eighty thousand men with thirty, and, if he did, he reasoned that Sacken and Yorck and Olsuvieff, singly or in combination, were easily a match for him. The messengers must surely be mistaken. This could only be a raid, a desperate stroke of some corps or division. Therefore, he halted and then drew back and concentrated on his rear guard waiting for further news.

Sacken and Yorck were nearer the fighting. They could hear and see for themselves. They at once gave over the pursuit of Macdonald and retraced their steps. Olsuvieff made good his defense until nightfall, when the survivors gave up the battle. Fifteen hundred men of his brave division had been killed on the plateau. As many more were wounded and captured, most of whom subsequently died, and there were about two thousand unhurt prisoners. Their ammunition was exhausted. They were worn out. They were overwhelmed by massed charges at last. Blucher's line was pierced, his center crushed, and one of the finest divisions of his army was eliminated.

In the wagon train recaptured at Aumenier had been found arms and provisions and ammunition. Another Prussian wagon train, blundering along the road, was seized by Maurice's cavalry, which had been sent scouting to the eastward. From the Russian camp the starving French had got food, more arms and clothing. The dead were quickly despoiled, even the living were forced to contribute to the comfort of their conquerors. It was night before the last French division got up from Sezanne, but there was enough food and weapons for all.

A new spirit had come over that army. What had seemed to them a purposeless, ghastly march through the mud was now realized to be one of the most brilliant manoeuvres Napoleon had ever undertaken. The conscripts, the raw boys, the National Guards, many of whom had been in action for the first time that day, were filled with incredible enthusiasm. They were ready for anything.

But the army must have rest. It must be permitted to sleep the night. Accordingly the divisions were disposed in the fields. Those who had fought hardest were given quarters in the village; the next were placed in the captured Russian camp; the others made themselves as comfortable as they could around huge fires. The poor prisoners had little or nothing. The ragged French were at least better clothed than they were in the morning. The defenseless had arms and the whole army had been fed. There was wine, too; the Russian commissariat was a liberal one. There was much laughter and jovialness in the camps that night. Of course, the guard and the other veterans expected nothing else, but to the youngsters the brilliant stroke of Napoleon was a revelation.

As the little Emperor rode from division to division, sometimes dismounting and walking through the camps on foot, he was received with such acclaim as reminded him of the old days in Italy. And, indeed, the brief campaign which he had so brilliantly inaugurated can be favorably compared to that famous Italian adventure, or to any other short series of consecutive military exploits in the whole history of war.

They said that the Emperor had hesitated and lost his great opportunity at Borodino. They said that he had frightfully miscalculated at Moscow, that his judgment had been grievously at fault in the whole Russian campaign. They said that he had sat idle during a long day when the fortunes of his empire might have been settled at Bautzen. They said that, overcome by physical weariness, he had failed to grasp his great opportunity after the victory at Dresden. They said that Leipsic and the battles that preceded it showed that he had lost the ability to see things with a soldier's eye. They declared that he made pictures and presented them to himself as facts; that he thought as an Emperor, not as a Captain. They said that in this very campaign in France, the same imperial obsession had taken such hold upon him that in striving to retain everything from Holland to the end of the Italian peninsula he stood to lose everything. They said that, if he had concentrated all his armies, withdrawn them from outlying dependencies, he could have overwhelmed Blucher and Schwarzenberg, the Czar Alexander, the Emperor Francis and King William, and that, having hurled them beyond the Rhine, these provinces in dispute would have fallen to his hand again. They said that his practical omnipotence had blinded his judgment.

Those things may be true. But, whether they be true or not, no man ever showed a finer strategic grasp of a situation, no man ever displayed more tactical ability on a given field, no man ever conducted a series of more brilliant enterprises, no man ever utilized a small, compact, well-handled force opposed to at least two and a half times its number, no man ever conducted a campaign which stood higher from a professional point of view than this one which began with the march from Nogent and the destruction at Champaubert.

There was no rest for Napoleon that night. Undoubtedly he was not now the man he had been. Paralyzing physical disabilities before and after interfered with his movements. The enormous strains to which he had subjected his body and brain sometimes resulted in periods of mental blindness and physical prostration. It was whispered that a strange malady--was it some form of epilepsy?--sometimes overcame the Emperor so that his faculties and abilities were in abeyance for hours. No man had ever abused such wonderful mental and physical gifts as he originally had possessed by subjecting them to such absolutely impossible strains as he, and Nature was having her revenge. But for that week in February and for a time thereafter there was a strange and marvelous return of the Emperor's physical powers.

He had sustained more fatigue than any man in the army, because to all of the personal sufferings of the march in

the long day and the sleepless night and the conduct of the battle had been added responsibility, but he was as fresh as a boy. His pale cheek showed rare color; his eyes sparkled; his voice was clear and sharp. The nervous twitching of his mouth ceased. The gray look vanished. He was once more the boyish Captain of the Army of Italy, at whom the huge grenadiers laughed and the gray-headed veterans marveled.

The Emperor's scouts had been hard at work during the day. They were constantly coming and going at his headquarters at Champaubert with detailed accounts of the situation of the Russians and the Prussians. The Emperor had a momentous decision to make. From the position he had gained it was equally as easy for him to strike east as to strike west. He decided at last to strike west, realizing that no captain, much less fiery old Blucher, without an absolute forfeiture of his reputation as a soldier could afford to leave his van unsupported, but that the Prussian Field Marshal must advance to its support. If the Emperor's plans worked out, he could destroy that van, and then turn back and mete out the same fate to the main body coming to its rescue.

Just about ten miles away to the westward, on the main road to Paris by way of La Ferte-sous-Jouarre, lay the village of Montmirail. As many miles beyond Montmirail, on the same Paris road, Sacken, with twenty thousand men, had been advancing. From Montmirail a road led northward to Chateau Thierry and the crossing of the Marne, behind which Macdonald had been driven by Yorck, with perhaps fifteen thousand more. The Emperor decided to seize Montmirail, throw out a corps to hold back Yorck on the northern road, while he crushed Sacken on the other with the remainder of the army, except one corps, which he would leave at Champaubert to delay Blucher's advance. These army corps were in reality nothing more than weak divisions, less than seven thousand strong.

Early in the afternoon Marteau, with old Bullet-Stopper and the little squadron of Maurice's cavalry, had rejoined the Emperor. He had been greatly refreshed by his night's sleep. He had taken advantage of the early hours of the morning to bury his father and sister, saying such prayers as he could remember, in default of the parish priest, who had been murdered. The Emperor having sent a courier with an escort back to Nogent, the Countess Laure and her English friend had elected to go with them. They feared to be left alone in the chateau all day, in the disturbed state of the country, and it was easier, perhaps, to reach Paris from Nogent by way of the Seine than by going direct from Sezanne. Marteau had approved of their decision.

The parting between the young people had been as formal as possible. The Englishman, on the contrary, with true British hospitality, had said that if peace ever came he would indeed be glad to welcome him at his home in England. Marteau had sworn to hold the chateau and its land in trust for the Countess, although she protested she would not hear of anything of the kind. And then he had bade her farewell. He had arrived in time to take part in the hard fighting at the close of the day, and had been busy during the early part of the night in carrying messages and resuming his duties at headquarters.

At two o'clock in the morning Napoleon threw himself down on a peasant's bed in a hut and slept until four. At that hour he awakened and summoned the officer on duty. Marteau presented himself. The Emperor, as refreshed by his two hours of sleep as if he had spent the night in a comfortable bed, addressed the young man familiarly. None could unbend better than he.

"My good Marteau," he began. "But stop--Monsieur le Comte d'Aumenier"--he smiled--"I have not forgot. Berthier has orders to send to Paris to have your patent of nobility made out and to see that the confiscated Aumenier lands are transferred to you."

"I thank your Majesty," said the young aide, deeming it wiser to say nothing of his ultimate intentions regarding the patent of nobility and the estates.

"It would be a fine thing," said the Emperor, "if you and that girl should come together. She is the last of her line, I understand, save her old uncle in England, who is unmarried and childless. Is it not so?"

"That is true, Sire."

"Well, you couldn't do better. She is a woman of spirit and resolution. Her prompt action in the chateau last night showed it. I commend her to your consideration. Were I your age and in your station I should like nothing better."

"Your Majesty anticipated my desire, my own proposition, in fact."

"What? You struck while you had the opportunity? That was well."

"But, unlike you, Sire, I struck unavailingly."

"The lady refused?"

"Positively. She is of the oldest family in France, while I----"

"Marteau," said the Emperor sharply, "no more of that. If you cannot be a descendant, be an ancestor. Look at me. My family began at Montemotte, and to-day the mother of my son is a Hapsburg!"

"But she is engaged to the son of that Englishman, Sire."

"Bah, what of that? Engagements can be broken, marriages even dissolved. The Holy Father at Rome will refuse me nothing. When I have beaten the allies I will take your affair in hand. There are few powers in Europe that will turn a deaf ear to the suggestions of the Emperor of the French, believe me. The lady shall be yours."

"Your Majesty's power," said the young officer dubiously, "does not extend to women's hearts."

"Does it not?" laughed the Emperor grimly. "You shall see. My word shall be law again everywhere. With my favor you will go far. There are no patents of nobility that stand higher than mine, for mine are based on my recognition of merit alone, not on accident of birth. You served me well, and you shall see that I am not ungrateful. Meanwhile, to you a new duty is assigned."

"I welcome it gladly."

Napoleon took an order prepared the night before from a table.

"This to General Nansouty. I want him to march at once. Read it. You will see," he continued, "that Nansouty's cavalry is to hold Sacken in check until I have seized Montmirail. He has guns with him. Let him deploy, attack vigorously. Keep the enemy occupied and gradually fall back upon Montmirail. Ride with him yourself, and rejoin me at Montmirail about ten in the morning. We should be up then. You understand?" said the Emperor, ready to explain his orders more fully, believing that an order could be more intelligently delivered if the purport were explained verbally to the bearer, especially in the case of a skilled and trusted young soldier like Marteau.

"I understand, Sire."

"Away, then. Continue to merit my favor, for upon that favor rests"--he laughed, he was in high good spirits and humor that morning--"the lady."

Marteau saluted. In spite of himself a certain hope began to spring up in his heart. That Emperor was almost a demi-god to his men. Whatever he had essayed he had generally achieved in times past, and who could tell? Certainly they were on the eve of great events.

CHAPTER XIV

THE HAMMER OF THE WAR GOD

Nansouty's brilliant cavalymen were already awake and their general having divined to some extent the part he was to play in the glorious day, the eleventh of February, the trumpets were already calling his horsemen to arms when Marteau delivered the order and took his place by the General as the Emperor's representative, a high position and great responsibility for so young a soldier. They made a hasty breakfast and broke camp. Indeed, there was little to break. The words are only used figuratively, since they had no tents. In half an hour after Marteau had left the Emperor's headquarters, the squadrons were formed. Nansouty, attended by his staff and the young officer, galloped to the head of the column, gave the word of command and the gallant horsemen trotted down the road.

They had been posted near Fromentieres, about two miles from Champaubert, for the night. The roads were bad, but they took to the fields, and by six o'clock they had passed through the town of Montmirail, easily driving out a few straggling battalions which occupied it. By eight o'clock they were in touch with the columns of Sacken at Vieux Maisons. A bit of woodland covered their approach. It was not until they were almost upon them that Sacken's advance came in touch with them. The French horse followed the Russian outposts and advance guards at a gallop

back to the main column, upon which they fell impetuously. Batteries were also deployed in the woods and opened on the Russians.

Sacken's men had started after breakfast in a rather leisurely way, and they had not progressed very far when Nansouty surprised them. The French rode down the advance regiments, threw the heads of the columns into confusion, and then galloped back to the shelter of the wood. Believing that he was about to be attacked in force, Sacken deployed, wasting much valuable time before he discovered this was only a cavalry feint, whereupon he moved forward. It was ten o'clock before he reached a large farm called Haute-Epine. By that time Napoleon was ready for him. He had left Marmont back at Champaubert to hold back Blucher. He threw Mortier forward on the Chateau-Thierry road to check Yorck. He put Friant, the veteran and splendid fighter, in echelon along the La Ferte road; withdrew Nansouty's cavalry to cover his own right, and put Ney and Ricard in his main battle line between Friant on the road and the river on the left. The guard, with Maurice's cavalry d'elite, he posted on the edge of the woodland, north of Montmirail, ready to throw to the northwestward to Marmont, or to the west to the support of Ney and Friant, as events might determine. These dispositions were barely completed before the battle was joined by the Russian advance.

Sacken, who really outnumbered the forces opposed to him by at least two thousand men, since Mortier's corps, guarding the northwest road, was perforce inactive, and since six thousand men had been left at Champaubert under Marmont to retain Blucher, attacked with the utmost stubbornness and gallantry. He could make no impression on Friant, echeloned on the main road, and before the resolute resistance his advancing divisions slowly obliqued to the right toward another walled farmhouse, called Epine-aux-Bois, in a stretch of lowland watered by a brook.

Napoleon, seeing the whole course of the battle clearly, laid a trap for him. He withdrew Nansouty from the battle, and ordered Ricard, in command of his extreme left, to retreat slowly, fighting as if defeated. Sacken, as he saw the wavering on his right, threw his heaviest battalions and regiments upon that point, and attacked with headlong impetuosity. At the same time he had enough men left to keep Friant busy and in check. Napoleon, seeing the success of his ruse, suddenly brought up the Guard. He threw it around the right flank of Friant, and Sacken's left immediately began to give way. Ricard stopped his retreat suddenly and stood like a stone wall. His withdrawing Eagles moved forward. The advance of the Russian right stopped also, the Muscovite officers and soldiers were greatly amazed by the sudden resistance of an enemy retreating a moment since. One division of the Guard moved out to the support of Friant, who also advanced. The other division joined Mortier, who was in a hot fight with Yorck's cavalry and light infantry. Napoleon now turned to General Maurice, who had ridden up in advance of his horsemen.

"There"--he pointed down the hill toward the dark masses of the Russian right--"there's your chance, General."

The Comte de Vivonne needed but the word. Turning in his saddle he raised his sword. His cavalry had been waiting with unconcealed impatience during the morning. Eagerly they responded to the command. Dashing down the hill they fell on the puzzled Russian infantry around Epine-aux-Bois. Ricard's men opened to give them way. What had been a triumphant advance was turned into a retreat. The retreat bade fair to be a disaster, but the Russians, as has been noted, were splendid defensive soldiers. They formed squares. Although regiment after regiment had been ridden over and beaten to pieces, those who remained fought stubbornly.

Sacken perceived now that his only hope was to effect a junction with Yorck. He withdrew his men under cover of his artillery to Vieux-Maisons, and began to lead them by the left flank, at the same time sending frantic messages to Yorck, imploring him to hasten. But Yorck's guns were mired. He had only the teams attached to them. He could get no other horses. He was unaccountably delayed. He had faced about at the sound of the firing, but the movements of his main body were slow, deliberate. Nansouty, who had opened the battle, was now sent in by Napoleon to deliver the *coup-de-grace*. With characteristic gallantry he fell upon the Russian columns.

Sacken was driven from the field. In killed, wounded, and prisoners he had lost half his force and all of his guns. His troops streamed westward through roads and woods in wild confusion. He would have been annihilated then and there but for the arrival of Yorck. The Prussian at last fell on Mortier's weak corps and the Guard on the northern road. Mortier's men were outnumbered four to one. They made a desperate resistance, but it was not until Napoleon ordered up the other division of the Guard, which had only been lightly engaged, and Maurice's cavalry, that Yorck's advance was checked.

The short day had drawn to a close. Preparations were made to pass the night on the field and in the town. All of Sacken's baggage train and provisions had fallen into Napoleon's hands. Montmirail had been a more decisive victory than Champaubert. Twenty thousand men had been eliminated from calculations for the time being. Sending couriers to Macdonald to move down the banks of the Marne with all possible speed, to get in the rear of Yorck, with whom he

purposed to deal on the morrow, Napoleon, in high spirits, made preparations for the next day's battle.

The next morning, the thirteenth, leaving a heavy force to check any possible attack by Sacken, who had, with incredible energy and labor, partially at least reorganized his shattered troops, but who was too weak to do anything more than lead them away from any possible touch with Napoleon's troops, the Emperor advanced toward the little village of Chateau-Thierry. Yorck, by this time, had learned the full details of the disaster to Sacken. Indeed, several of Sacken's brigades had joined him, considerably augmenting his force. But he was now no match for Napoleon. To stay meant annihilation. He hastily made his disposition for a rear guard defense and a withdrawal. He made a stubborn rear guard battle of it during the day, and, although he lost heavily in men, guns and supplies, he finally succeeded in crossing the Marne and breaking the bridges behind him.

Macdonald had moved tardily. If he had shown half the enterprise of the Emperor he would have been at the crossing of the Marne in good time and Yorck would have been caught in a trap whence he could not have extricated himself. As it was, Napoleon added largely to the number of prisoners taken and the number of enemies killed. Altogether he had put twenty-five thousand men out of action, in killed, wounded and prisoners. He had taken one hundred and twenty guns--so many that he had to tumble them into the creeks and rivers, because he could not transport them all. He had rearmed and reclothed and provided for his gallant little army at the expense of the enemy. It was an exploit of which even he could be proud. On the other hand, in these operations the French had lost some four thousand men killed and wounded, and, as their army was so small, they could ill afford such a diminution of their forces.

Meantime, Blucher, apprised of these disasters, and at last awakened to his peril, bravely marched westward. He had come in touch with Marmont, and had driven him out of Champaubert after a desperate resistance. The day after the elimination of Yorck, the fourteenth, Napoleon headed his tired but triumphant troops back over the road to Champaubert, sending word to Marmont to hold the Prussians in check as long as possible, to dispute every rod of the way, but not to throw away his precious men or bring on a general engagement until the Emperor arrived.

The morning after that Napoleon fell on Blucher, who clearly outnumbered the French. But the allies were dismayed and disheartened. The name of the Emperor whom they had defeated and driven across Europe was again full of terror to them. The French were accordingly elated. They would not be denied. Marmont's men, intoxicated with the news of the success of the other divisions of the army, just as soon as they were given the word, which was just as soon as Napoleon could bring up their comrades, fell on Blucher like a storm. They came in battle contact in the village of Vauchamps. The fighting was of the most desperate character. The battle was harder than all of the others put together. Bavarians, Prussians, and Russians, fighting under the eye of brave old Blucher himself, who recklessly exposed his person on the field, were tenacious and courageous to the highest degree, but the tactics and dispositions of Napoleon, the spirit of his men, his own equally reckless exposure of his person under fire, and a cavalry dash at the allied rear at Janvilliers, finally turned the wavering tide of battle. The allies began to retreat, the French followed.

The French pursued relentlessly, but with splendid skill and determination Blucher himself in command of the rearguard fought them off. Napoleon had foreseen this. He had massed all the cavalry under Grouchy and had sent them on a long round-about march across country to get in Blucher's rear. Just beyond Champaubert, in a dense wood in front of the village of Etoges, the retreating allies found the road barred by the cavalry. Grouchy had been provided with sufficient artillery to enable him to hold the retreat in check; but the mud still prevailed, many horses had been shot and killed, the peasants' horses drawing the guns had been unable to keep pace with the necessarily rapid movements of the cavalry, and the batteries had not come up. Nor was there any supporting infantry. Indeed, the retreat of the Prussians had been so sudden and so rapid that Grouchy's horse had been hard put to it to intercept them.

The regiments leading the allied retreat were formed in squares, and with musketry and cannon animated with the courage of despair, they forced a passage through the charging, barring masses of the French cavalry, not, however, without losing several of the squares in the process. It was their only possible way to safety. As it was, Blucher himself narrowly escaped capture.

Napoleon's soldiers had fought five pitched battles in four days. As a preparation, they had marched thirty miles, night and day, over incredible roads. They were now utterly exhausted. They could do no more. They must have a good rest. Blucher's forces had been scattered, eliminated, defeated in detail. There was now nothing for the Field Marshal to do but to retreat and rally his men. The success of the Emperor had been brilliant in the extreme.

The fighting was not over, however, for thirty miles to the southward lay the vast army of Schwarzenberg. Napoleon might have pursued Blucher to the bitter end. Military critics say he should have done so. To him, however,

on the spot, it seemed proper to leave Blucher for the time being and endeavor to repeat on Schwarzenberg the marvelous tactics of the five days' fight.

The next morning, the fifteenth, he started back to Nogent whence he had come. Victor and Oudinot had been fighting hard with Schwarzenberg, but the news of Napoleon's victories had finally caused the cautious Austrian to stop. He began the recall and concentration of his own scattered divisions. He, at least, would not be caught napping. As usual the enemy learned something, even in defeat.

Speed was still essential to Napoleon. His men had had twenty-four hours of rest. His horses were comparatively fresh. The weather had changed, the roads were frozen, horribly rough, but still much more passable than before. Once again the Emperor resorted to the peasantry. They, too, had been intoxicated with the news of his victories, many of which they had witnessed and, in the plunder resulting, had shared. They brought their horses which they had hidden in ravines and forests when the country was overrun by the enemy. This time, instead of attaching them to the guns which their own teams--recruited from the captures--could draw on the hard roads, Napoleon had them hitched to the big farm wagons. Into the wagons he loaded his infantry. And at the highest speed of the horses the whole force made its way to the southward. To other victories--to defeats--to what?

The Emperor began once again to dream of an empire whose boundaries would be the Vistula instead of the Rhine.

BOOK II

THE EAGLE'S FLIGHT

CHAPTER XV

THE BRIDGE AT ARCIS

The long journey was at last over. The last Alp had been surmounted, the last pass traversed. Behind them rose the snowy summit of mighty Mont Blanc itself. Before them lay their wearying journey's end. It was cold even in sunny Southern France on that morning in early spring. Marteau, his uniform worn, frayed, travel-stained, and dusty, his close-wrapped precious parcel held to his breast under his shabby great coat, his face pale and haggard from hardship and heartbreak, his body weak and wasted from long illness and long captivity, stood on the top of a ridge of the hill called Mont Rachais, overlooking the walled town of Grenoble, on the right bank of the Isere. The Fifth-of-the-Line had been stationed there before in one of the infrequent periods of peace during the Napoleonic era. He was familiar with the place and he knew exactly where to look for what he expected to see.

More ragged and tattered, more travel-stained indeed, and with only the semblance of a uniform left, was the young lad who stood by the soldier's side. But the boy was in good health and looked strong and sturdy.

"There," said the officer. "You see that square bulk of buildings against the wall beyond the Cathedral church-tower and over the Palais de Justice?"

"I see them, my officer," answered the other, shading his hand and staring over the roofs and walls and spires of the compact little town.

"The barracks will be there unless the regiment has moved. That will be the end of our journey."

"The building with the flag, you mean, monsieur?" asked Pierre.

"That one."

Alas! the flag was no longer the tricolor but the white flag of ancient royal France. Marteau heaved a deep sigh as he stared at it with sad eyes and sadder face.

The unexpected, that is, from the young soldier's point of view, had happened. The empire was no more. The allies had triumphed. The Emperor has been beaten. He had abdicated and gone. He was practically a prisoner on the little island of Elba, adjacent to that greater island of Corsica, where he had been born. The great circle of his life had been completed. And all the achievements were to be comprehended between those two little islands in the blue Mediterranean--from Corsica to Elba, the phrase ran. Was that all?

Much water had flowed under the bridges of Europe since that mad ride of the infantry in the farm wagons to face Schwarzenberg after their smashing and successful attacks upon Blucher, although the intervening time had been short. A year had scarcely elapsed, but that twelve months had been crowded with incident, excitement, and vivid interest almost unparalleled by any similar period in modern history. The Emperor had, indeed, fought hard for his throne and against heavy odds. He had fought against indifference, against carelessness, against negligence, last of all against treachery. For in the end it was treachery that had undone him and France. Still, it may be that even had Marmont and Mortier remained loyal the end would have been the same.

The odds were too heavy, in fine. The Emperor did not realize their preponderance until it was too late. If he had assembled every soldier, abandoning everything else but the defense of France, and if he had shown with such an army as he could have gathered under those conditions the same spirit of generalship which he had exhibited in that marvelous campaign against Blucher, he might have saved France, his throne, his wife, his little son, his prestige, everything. As it was, he lost all. But not without fighting. Stubborn, determined, magnificently defiant he had been to the last.

Marteau had often thrilled to the recollection during the long hours he spent in captivity in Austria, and even in the delirium and fever of his long and wasting illness, begot of the foul prison, he had remembered it. In all the hard

fighting and hard marching of those mournful if splendid days the young man had faithfully and well borne his important if humble part. There was a great dearth of officers, staff officers as well as the others. He had been very near to the Emperor during those last days.

He remembered the smashing attack upon the van of the allies at Montereau. He could feel once more the thrill of the army, as the circumspect Schwarzenberg stopped his advance, retired, concentrated his columns. He remembered the long, swift march back across the country, after further demonstrations to keep Schwarzenberg in his cautious mood, against the rear of the reorganized and advancing army of Blucher; the desperate, bloody, fruitless battles of Laon and Craonne, rendered necessary by treachery.

He could recall again the furious rage of Napoleon, the almost despair that filled the Emperor's heart, when the news came of the cowardly surrender of the fort at Soissons by its incapable commandant, which rendered useless Napoleon's cunning plans, and all the hard marching and harder fighting of his heroic soldiery.

He recalled the escape of hard-pressed Blucher again, the return of the French to face the overwhelming main army of the allies, slowly but surely moving toward its goal whenever the withdrawal of the Emperor left it free to advance, the detachment of Marmont and Mortier to defend Paris, the fierce two-day battle at Arcis-sur-Aube, the dash of Maurice's and Sebastiani's gallant cavalry upon the whole Austrian army, the deadly conflict before the bridge, the picture of the retreat that bade fair to become a rout.

He could see again the Emperor, riding down, sword in hand, into the midst of the fugitives crossing the bridge, and, amid a storm of bullets, ordering and beseeching and imploring the men to rally. He had been there on that mad March morning. He would never forget the sight of that figure, the words the Emperor said. It reminded him of the dash of the "little corporal" with the flag on the bridge of Lodi, of which old Bullet-Stopper had often told him and the other young men over the camp-fires.

The Fifth-of-the-Line had immortalized itself that day, adding to the fame it had gained upon a hundred fields, an imperishable crown. Napoleon saw that the battle was lost, that the whole Austrian army had blundered upon that first French division and that, unless their steady advance could be checked, the division itself would be cut to pieces. Men had grown more precious to the Emperor every hour. What would he not have given for those he had spent so recklessly years before? And here was a whole division about to be annihilated, to say nothing of the cavalry, which had performed prodigies of valor.

"What regiment is that?" he had asked Marteau, who was riding at his heels in the midst of the fugitives, and doing his best to second the Emperor's frantic efforts to restore order and bring the men to a stand.

"The Fifth-of-the-Line, Sire."

"Your old regiment?"

"The same, Sire."

"It still stands."

"And it will stand."

"Good! Go to it. Tell them that I, the Emperor, devote them to death, for me and for the army. They must hold the Austrians in check and cover the retreat."

"Farewell, Sire," the young soldier had said, saluting.

"What mean you?"

"I shall not come back with the remainder."

"Adieu," said the Emperor, acknowledging the salute and understanding all.

How well Marteau remembered that frightful conflict. The Fifth-of-the-Line had not waited to be attacked. It had gone forward. The Colonel had been shot down. Officer after officer had fallen. The advancing line had wavered, hesitated, halted. The Eagle-bearer fell. Eager hands caught the staff. The Austrian fire was concentrated upon it. The color guard was shot to pieces. The Eagle itself had the tip of its right wing shot away. Mortal men could do no more. The regiment began to give back.

It was Marteau who sprang to the front, he and young Pierre, who had attached himself to the officer in a sort of unofficial way. It was Marteau who seized the Eagle; it was he who rallied the line. The new men formed up like veterans, the old men settled in their places, cool and ready. They returned the Austrian fire, they checked the Austrian advance, they stood ready while the troops behind them ran for their lives. Napoleon, whose eye nothing escaped, saw it all. He even recognized Marteau carrying the Eagle.

The Fifth-of-the-Line made good that defense until the time came for the retreat. Then it retired slowly, fighting every step of the way down the low hill to the bridge. The men dropped by scores. The Austrians, seeing victory in reach, pressed closer. A charge at the last minute by the cuirassiers of the Emperor Francis' guard almost completed the annihilation of the first battalion of the regiment. The survivors sought to form a square, under a withering gun fire, to meet the uplifted sabers of the heavy cavalry. There were not enough of them left. They were ridden down. Two hundred and fifty of the four hundred who went into that fight lay dead on that field. Of the survivors scarce a handful got across the river. Some of the unhurt men, disdaining quarter and unable to fly, fought until they fell. The wounded, of whom there were many, were all captured out of hand.

Marteau, with the Eagle, had stood nearest the enemy. They had swarmed about him at last. He found himself alone, save for the boy, Pierre. He could see the red-faced, excited, shouting, yelling, passion-animated Austrian soldiers crowding upon him. His sword was broken, his pistols empty and gone. He was defenseless. Retreat was cut off. The Eagle staff had been shot away. The flag torn to pieces. Hands were stretched out to seize it. He could not escape with it, yet it must not fall to the enemy. It was the tradition of the service that the Eagles were to be preserved at all hazards--not the flag, that was a mere perishable adjunct to the Eagle, but the Eagle itself. The river ran but a few feet away. Thrusting aside the nearest Austrian with the stump of his blade, Marteau cleared a path for a second, and into the swift deep waters he hurled the sacred emblem.

He, at least, he thought swiftly, had a right to dispose of it thus, for out of the waters of the Elster he had brought it, so into the waters of the Aube he threw it.

With cries of rage, for the Eagle was the most precious spoil of war, and the regiment or the officer seizing it was distinguished above all others, the Austrians would have cut him down where he stood with arms crossed, facing the enemy, but officers who had ridden up had seen the exploit and had interfered. He had been made a prisoner and Pierre with him. He just had time to whisper to the boy to mark well the spot where the Eagle had disappeared in the waters before they marched away.

While under guard with other prisoners at Salzburg he had heard the story of the end. How Napoleon, trusting the defense of Paris to Marmont and Mortier, had resolved on the bold move of cutting the communications of the allies with his little army, and how the allies had decided to disregard their rear and march on Paris; how Marmont and Mortier had battled for the capital, how the Emperor, hearing of their straits, had begun that mad march toward his beloved city; how he had ordered every soldier that could be reached to march in that direction; how he had stopped at a wayside inn one night for a few hours' rest, after a furious day's ride, only to be told that Marmont and Mortier had gone over to the enemy, that Paris was lost!

The prisoners had learned how the Emperor, not yet despairing, had striven to quicken the spirits of his marshals and soldiers for a last try; how the marshals and great officers had failed him. They had all heard of those lonely hours at Fontainebleau, of the farewell to the Guard, of the kiss on the Eagle, which he surrendered to General Petit, of the abdication, of the exile to Elba, of the restoration of King Louis.

It had made Marteau ill, frightfully so, and but for the tender nursing and loving care of young Pierre he had died. The lad had been devotion itself, but Marteau missed more than anything else the companionship, the sage advice, the bon camaraderie of old Bullet-Stopper. He had never seen him or heard from him after that day at the bridge-head at Arcis. Where was he now?

Oh, yes, those days and their tidings would never be forgot. They all came back to the young officer, as with his humble but devoted companion he stood there on the heights above Grenoble looking at the white flag.

CHAPTER XVI

THE GATE IN THE WALL

The two travelers were stopped by the guard at the main gate in the walls that encircled the town. Marteau had drawn his old cloak closely about him, so that it was not evident that he was in uniform. Pierre's nondescript garments were so tattered and torn that neither would they betray the pair. The sentry was clad in the old uniform of the Fifth-of-the-Line, except that he sported a white cockade in his head-gear and every device that referred to the Empire had been carefully eliminated. Still he was the same soldier, and Marteau recognized him at once as one of the veterans of the regiment. The recognition was not mutual. Captivity, illness, privation had wrought many changes in the officer's face. The man looked at him curiously and wonderingly, however, as he challenged him.

"My friend," asked the officer, "of what regiment are you, I pray?"

"The Fifth-of-the----" began the man instinctively, apparently, and then he stopped. "The regiment Dauphine," he answered, his face clouding.

"And what battalion?"

"The first, sir."

"Are there other troops in garrison?"

"Another regiment of infantry, that was the Seventh. I don't know its new name. And some artillery to man the walls."

"Good. I should like---- Who is in command of the town?"

"There is a new one since yesterday. He has just come down from Paris, the King sent----"

At that instant the gruff voice of the subaltern in command of the detachment at the gate rang out.

"Turn out the guard for the Commanding Officer."

"Back, monsieur," cried the soldier, falling into line with his comrades, who came running from the guard-house and ranged themselves in order.

Marteau stepped back into the shadow of the gate, just as a carriage and four, carrying three people and attended by a brilliant cavalry escort, dashed through the narrow street of the town and passed out of the gate, the soldiers of the guard standing at attention in line and presenting arms as the carriage and its following went on into the country by the highroad. The horses had been moving at a fast trot. Marteau had time for but one glance as the vehicle passed. One glance was enough. When the guard had been dismissed and the soldier on post turned again to look at the officer, he was astonished at the change that had come over him. Marteau, pale as death, leaned against the wall, his hand on his heart.

"What's the matter?" cried the soldier, staring at him curiously.

"Has monsieur seen a ghost?" asked young Pierre, running toward him in great anxiety.

"Who--who was that?" asked Marteau, who had received a dreadful shock apparently.

"The governor of the town."

"Yes, yes, I know, but his name?"

"I was about to tell you. The Marquis de---- Upon my word, I have forgot it."

"Was it by any chance the Marquis d'Aumenier?"

"That's it," said the soldier.

"And the man with him in the red coat?"

The soldier spat into the dust to show his contempt.

"An English milord."

"And the lady?"

"I don't know. They say, the wife of that Englishman. Things have come to a pretty pass," growled the soldier, turning away, "when our girls marry these English beef-eaters, and---- It was not so in the day of the Em----"

He stopped suddenly, wondering fearfully whether his garrulousness had betrayed him into an imprudence with this stranger.

"No," said Marteau reassuringly. "Will you let me pass, comrade? I am an old soldier of--the Empire." He had no hesitation in avowing himself under the circumstances. "See," he threw open his cloak, disclosing his uniform.

"Why, that is the uniform of this regiment!" exclaimed the amazed soldier.

"Yes."

"And you are----"

"I was Captain Marteau when with the regiment," returned the officer.

"I thought I knew you, sir. Yes, I remember it all now. You were cut down at the bridge at Arcis."

"Yes."

"I, too, was there. I was one of the few who managed to get away alive. But I did not run, monsieur. I did not go back until the order."

"I believe it."

"And this boy?"

"He is a young comrade, a faithful companion of my own."

"And you are come back----"

"To rejoin the regiment. I have been months in an Austrian prison, and afterward, ill."

"Pass freely, monsieur. You rallied us with the Eagle. We saw it go into the river. The Emperor himself commended us, those who were left. He said we should have another Eagle, but alas, we never got it."

"Have patience," said Marteau. "What is lost may be found."

He touched the small, well-wrapped parcel, which even in his agitation he had not allowed to fall to the ground. The soldier looked at him wonderingly.

"You mean----"

"Never mind. Be silent. Will you call your officer?"

"Corporal of the guard," shouted the sentry, and, when that official appeared, the lieutenant in command of the gate was soon summoned through the usual military channels.

"Monsieur," said Marteau, walking up to him, "do you not know me?"

"By heaven!" cried the officer, after a long stare, "is it--it is Captain Marteau!"

"The same."

"We thought you dead. Your name is honored in the regiment. We knew how you rallied the line; how you took the Eagle; how you threw it into the river rather than permit it to be taken. We thought you were killed."

"My life was spared," was the solemn answer.

"But why did you not rejoin the regiment?"

"I was in prison at Salzburg, and for some reason was overlooked, perhaps because it was thought I was dead, and then for some months I was helpless, ill of a horrible fever. It was only two months ago that I was set free, with this lad here, who stood beside me before the bridge at Arcis. We learned through unofficial sources that the regiment was here. Having nowhere else to go, I came back, and----"

"They will be glad to see you," said the officer. "The regiment lost heavily. It was almost cut to pieces at Arcis."

"I know."

"But many officers and men of the old regiment have come back, like you, from Russia, from Prussia and from Austria, where they had been held prisoners. They will be glad to welcome you at the barracks yonder. You are permitted to pass. But stop. I must do my duty. What have you in that parcel?"

Marteau looked about him, moved a step away from the sentries and the corporal and sergeant of the guard, and whispered a word into the ear of the officer. He threw up his hands in astonishment.

"Mon Dieu!" he exclaimed. "Is it possible?"

"The same," said Marteau, "but say nothing about it until I have seen our comrades."

"Of course not."

"And that carriage and four that just passed?"

"The governor of the town, the Marquis d'Aumenier, the new commander of the regiment."

"I see; and our old Colonel?"

"Dead. The Major commanding the first battalion has been in command until they sent this old noble down here yesterday."

"And the lady?"

"His niece."

"You have met her?"

"Not I. They care nothing for such as we. He treats us as if we were of the scum of the earth, dogs. Oh, if only----"

"Hush," said Marteau. "It is dangerous."

"I know. And he brought with him an Englishman, one of the Duke of Wellington's officers."

"Is he married to the young lady?"

"Not yet, I believe, but betrothed."

"And his name?"

"He has a barbarous name. I can't pronounce it. He had us out inspecting us yesterday--he and that Englishman. Bah! To think of the Fifth-of-the-Line being inspected by such a young red-coated cockerel."

The veteran spat in the dust as the soldier had done and swore roundly. He hated the red-coated English. He had fought them before, and he would like nothing better than to fight them again.

"Patience," said Marteau.

"Do you wish to go to headquarters and report yourself? You were a Major on the Emperor's staff?"

"A Lieutenant-Colonel, by personal appointment that day at Arcis."

"Well, you will be lucky enough if they make you a subaltern. Look at me. I am older than you. I am a veteran of

Italy and I am only a sub-lieutenant, I, who was Captain when I was captured."

"Patience, my friend," said Marteau again.

"Here," said the officer, hailing a cabriolet, which suddenly turned the corner.

"I have no money," said Marteau quickly.

"The King pays ill enough," answered the officer, "but what I have is ever at the service of a good comrade."

He assisted Marteau into the cabriolet, allowed Pierre to climb up beside him, paid the driver his fare, and bade him take the two to the headquarters in the barracks.

CHAPTER XVII

A VETERAN OF THE ARMY OF ITALY

It was noon when Marteau presented himself before the house in which the Major of the first battalion, an old veteran named Lestoype, was quartered.

"Who shall I say wants to see him?" asked the orderly before the door.

"A soldier of the Empire," was the bold answer, and it proved an open sesame to the astonished orderly.

Lestoype was writing at a table, but he looked up when Marteau came in. He stared at him a moment and then rose to his feet.

"I report myself ready for duty, Major," said the young officer, saluting.

"Good God, is it Marteau!" exclaimed the Major.

"The same."

"We thought you dead."

Rapidly the young officer explained the situation.

"You see," he said in closing, "I survived the Eagle."

"Ah, if we could only have got it back!" exclaimed the Major.

"It is back."

"What do you mean?"

"It is here."

"I don't understand."

"Look," cried the officer, nervously tearing away the wrappings and holding up his precious burden.

The Major came to attention, his heels clicked together, his hand went up. He stared at the Eagle.

"*Vive l'Empereur*," he said.

"*Vive l'Empereur*," answered the other, but both of them spoke in whispers, for there was no Emperor, and a mention of the name was treason to the King.

"It is the same?" asked the Major, taking the precious emblem in his hand and pressing it to his heart.

"The very same."

"But how?"

"The boy here and I marked the spot where it fell. We took bearings, as a sailor would say; we took them independently, and when we had a chance to compare them we found that we agreed exactly. When I was released from prison and discharged from the hospital as a convalescent, we went back to Arcis, to the bridge, to the river side. The boy here is an expert swimmer. The river was low. He dove into the icy waters again and again until he found it. We were most circumspect in our movements. No one observed us. I wrapped it up, concealed it carefully, learned that the regiment was here, and I surrender it into your hands."

"It is a shame," began Lestoype gloomily at last, laying the Eagle gently down on his desk.

"What is a shame?"

"The order."

"What order?"

"The Eagles of all the regiments and ships are to be sent to Paris to be destroyed."

"Impossible!"

"Nevertheless, it is true. They have taken them wherever they could lay hands on them. It has almost caused a revolt."

"And are you going to send this Eagle to Paris?" asked Marteau threateningly. "This Eagle for which I fought, this Eagle which I rescued from the Elster and the Aube, for which hundreds of brave men have died, this Eagle which has been in the forefront of every battle in which the regiment took part since the Emperor gave it into our keeping before Ulm?"

"What can I do?"

"I will throw it into the Isere first. I will destroy it myself before that happens," cried Marteau, snatching it up and pressing it to his heart. "I have taken no oaths. I am still the Emperor's man."

"Not so loud," said Lestoype warningly. "The men of the regiment may not all be true. You may be overheard."

"You and all the others have taken the oath of allegiance to the King?"

"What else was there to do? Soldiering is my trade. They offered us commissions; the Empire was dead; the Emperor banished. It was a living, at any rate."

"But I am free, I am not bound."

"You must, you will take the oath," urged Lestoype.

"How if he should come back?"

"He will not come back."

"Will he not? It is whispered everywhere," said Marteau. "I have not passed an old soldier who did not voice the hope. It's in the air. 'When the violets bloom,' they say. Even the peasants whisper it. The imperial purple flower---- He will return."

"God grant it may be so."

"And we shall be ready for him, we who have not taken the oath, and who----"

"I am afraid I shall be a forsworn man, in that case," said the veteran, smiling grimly. "Should the Emperor again set foot in France his presence would absolve us from all vows. I only serve under the King's colors because no others fly in France."

"Be it so."

"And you will be with us again in the regiment?"

"How can I?"

"Be advised," said the old soldier, laying his hand upon the arm of the younger, "we must keep together. We must keep our regimental organizations intact. The army must be ready for him. Take the oath as well nigh every soldier high and low in France has done, and----"

"Well, I shall see. Meanwhile, the Eagle there. You won't give it up?"

"Give it up!" laughed Lestoype. "I feel just as you do about it, but we must conceal it. The Seventh, Labedoyere's regiment, in garrison here, concealed their Eagle. At least it has not been found. There was a terrible to do about it."

"Do you vouch for the officer at the main gate? I had to tell him in order to be passed. I know him but slightly."

"The Sub-Lieutenant Drehon."

"He is safe?"

"Beyond doubt. Meanwhile, you require----"

"Everything," said Marteau simply.

"The King's paymasters are a long time in coming. We are left to make shift as best we can. But I am not yet penniless," returned the old Major. He threw a purse on the table. "You will be my guest. With these you can get proper clothes and uniform."

"And the boy?"

"I will turn him over to the men. They will be glad to welcome him. He should have the Legion of Honor for rescuing the Eagle. But stop."

"What is it?"

"He won't talk?"

"I have tested that lad. He will be as close-mouthed as the grave. You understand, Pierre, you are not to say a word about the Eagle until I give you leave," said Marteau to his young comrade. "About our other adventures you can tell."

"I understand. Monsieur knows that I can be silent."

"I know. Good-by. I shall see you to-morrow. Now," began Marteau, as the orderly who had been summoned had taken Pierre away with instructions to see that he was clothed and fed, "let me ask some questions. Who was in command of the regiment?"

"I was until yesterday."

"And yesterday?"

"The King sent down an old officer to take the command, a Lieutenant-Colonel."

"And the Colonel?"

"Monsieur d'Artois."

"So that----"

"The Lieutenant-Colonel commands the regiment, which is now known as the Regiment Dauphine, the Comte d'Artois' own," said the Major, with fine scorn. "What a name to take the place of the Fifth-of-the-Line," he added.

"And Monsieur d'Aumenier?"

"Oh, he seems harmless enough. He is a trained soldier, too, of royalist days before the Empire. He even told me he had been at the school at Brienne when the Emperor was a student there."

"And who is with him?"

"His niece, the Countess Laure d'Aumenier, engaged to that young English officer."

"And what of him?"

"Well enough for an Englishman, I suppose," was the careless answer. "We were paraded yesterday and the young Englishman inspected us, the lady looking on. Actually my gorge rose, as he handled our muskets, criticized our drill. I heard some of the old mustaches of the regiment say they would like to put a bayonet through him, and, to be frank, I should like it myself. I fought against these English in Spain. There's no love lost between us."

"Did he disparage the regiment?"

"Oh, no, quite the contrary. He was more than complimentary, but I hate them. His father is here, too."

"I see. When is the marriage to take place?"

"How do I know? I was surprised when the old Marquis volunteered any information to the likes of me."

"I must see the Marquis at once; with your permission, of course."

"You have it," returned the other, smiling. "You are not yet reinstated in the regiment, and, so far as I am concerned, you are free to go and come as you will."

"He is not here now, I believe?"

"No. He turned over the command to me temporarily. He is driving out into the country, going out to the gap to reconnoiter for himself, I take it, but he will be back before nightfall, and meanwhile you have much to do. We want to get you well fed, to get some good French wine into you, to put the blood into your veins and color into your cheeks, to give you a bath, to get you clothing--everything," said the generous old veteran.

CHAPTER XVIII

ALMOST A GENTLEMAN

"Will you tell the Lieutenant-Colonel, the Marquis d'Aumenier, that an officer returned from the wars desires to see him?" said Marteau to the footman who answered the door at the Governor's palace.

"So many wandering officers want to see His Excellency," said the servant superciliously, "that I have instructions to require further enlightenment before I admit any to his presence."

"Say to your master," replied the other, his face flushing at the insolence of the servant, "that one from the village of Aumenier craves an audience on matters of great importance."

"And even that will scarcely be sufficient," began the lackey.

"Enough!" thundered Marteau. "Carry my message to him instantly," he said fiercely, "or I shall throw you aside and carry it myself."

The servant looked at him a moment, and not relishing what he saw, turned on his heel and disappeared.

"His Excellency will see you, sir," he said, in a manner considerably more respectful when he returned a few moments later. "This way, sir. His Excellency is in the drawing-room, having finished his dinner. What name shall I announce?" he asked, his hand on the door.

"Announce no one," was the curt reply. "Open the door. I will make myself known."

The lackey threw open the door. Marteau entered the room and closed the door behind him. The drawing-room of the Governor's palace was brilliantly illuminated. The Governor was receiving the officers of the garrison and the principal inhabitants of the city that night, but it was yet early in the evening, and none of them had arrived. The young officer had purposely planned his visit at that hour, in order that he might have a few moments' conversation with the Marquis before the invited guests arrived.

There were five people gathered about the fireplace, all engrossed in pleasant conversation apparently. It was the second of March, and the weather made the fire blazing on the hearth very welcome. Four of the five people in the room were men; the fifth person was a woman. It was she whose attention was first aroused by the sound of the closing of the door. She faced about, her glance fell upon the newcomer, a cup which she held in her hand fell to the floor, the precious china splintering into a thousand fragments, her face turned as white as the lace of her low evening gown.

"Marteau!" she exclaimed in almost an agonized whisper.

"Mademoiselle," answered the soldier, bowing profoundly.

He was beautifully dressed in the nearest approach to the latest fashion that the best tailor in Grenoble could offer--thanks to the Major's purse--and, although his most becoming attire was not a uniform, his every movement betrayed the soldier, as his every look bespoke the man.

"And who have we here?" asked the oldest man of the group, the Marquis d'Aumenier himself, the attention of all being attracted to the newcomer by the crash of the broken china and the low exclamation of the young woman which none had made out clearly.

"By gad!" bellowed out with tremendous voice a stout old man, whose red face and heavy body contrasted surprisingly with the pale face, the lean, thin figure of the old Marquis, "I am damned if it isn't the young Frenchman that held the chateau with us. Lad," he cried, stepping forward and stretching out his hand, "I am glad to see you alive. I asked after you, as soon as I came back to France, but they told me you were dead."

"On the contrary, as you see, sir, I am very much alive, and at Sir Gervaise Yeovil's service as always," said Marteau, meeting the Englishman's hand with his own, touched by the other's hearty greeting, whose genuineness no one could doubt. "And this gentleman?" he went on, turning to a young replica of the older man, who had stepped to his father's side.

"Is my son, Captain Frank Yeovil, of King George's Fifty-second Light Infantry. By gad, I am glad to have him make your acquaintance. He is going to marry the Marquis' niece here--your old friend--when they can settle on a day. You had thoughts in that direction yourself, I remember," he went on, in his bluff way, "but I suppose you have got bravely over them by now," he laughed.

"I have resigned myself to the inevitable, monsieur," answered Marteau with a calmness that he did not feel.

He did not dare to look at the Countess Laure as he spoke. He could not have commanded himself if he had done so. His lips were compressed and his face was paler than before. The girl saw it. She had watched him, fascinated. The Englishman, young, frank, sunny-haired, gallant, stepped up to him, shook him by his unwilling hand.

"I am glad to know you," he said. "I have heard how you saved my betrothed's life and honor, and held the chateau. I have longed to meet you, to thank you."

"And I you," said Marteau. "You English are frank. I shall be likewise," he added. "It was not thus I wanted to meet you, monsieur, not in a drawing-room, in this peaceful dress, but--on the field."

"I understand," said the Englishman, sobered a little by the other's seriousness. "And if the war had continued perhaps we might have settled the--er"--his eyes sought those of his fiancee, but she was not looking at him--"our differences," he added, "in the old knightly way, but now---"

"Now it is impossible," assented Marteau, "since my Emperor and I are both defeated."

"Monsieur," broke in the high, rather sharp voice of the old Marquis, "that is a title which is no longer current in France. As loyal subjects of, the King the word is banished--like the man."

"I am but new to France, Monsieur le Marquis, and have not yet learned to avoid the ancient habit."

"And yet you are a Frenchman," commented the Marquis dryly. "You said you came from Aumenier. I did not catch your name, sir?"

"Marteau, at your service."

"One of the loyal Marteaux?"

"The last one, sir."

"And pray why are you new to France?"

"I have but two months since been released from an Austrian prison and an Austrian hospital."

"I made inquiry," said the Countess suddenly, the tones of her voice bespeaking her deep agitation, "I caused the records to be searched. They said you were dead, that you had been killed at the bridge of Arcis with the rest of your regiment."

"I was unfortunate enough to survive my comrades as you see, mademoiselle," said Marteau.

"And I thank God for that," said the Countess Laure. "I have never forgot what you did for me, and----"

"Nor has the memory of your interposition which twice saved my life escaped from my mind for a single instant, mademoiselle."

"Yes, it was very fine, no doubt, on the part of both of you," said Captain Yeovil, a little impatiently, because he did not quite see the cause of all this perturbation on the part of his betrothed; "but you are quits now, and for my part---"

"What I did for mademoiselle is nothing, monsieur. I shall always be in her debt," replied the Frenchman.

"Monsieur St. Laurent," said the Marquis, turning to the other occupant of the room, "my new adjutant, Monsieur Marteau," he added in explanation, "was there not a Marteau borne on the rolls of the regiment? I think I saw the name when I looked yesterday, and it attracted me because I knew it."

"Yes, your Excellency," said St. Laurent, "he was a Captain when he was detached."

"You were on service elsewhere, *Monsieur mon Capitaine*?" asked the Marquis.

"I was a Lieutenant-Colonel, your Excellency."

"And where and when?"

"On the day at Arcis. Made so by"--he threw up his head--"by him who cannot be named."

"Ah! Quite so," said the Marquis, helping himself to a pinch of snuff from a jeweled box, quite after the fashion of the old regime. He shut the box and tapped it gently. "There is, I believe, a vacancy in the regiment, a Captaincy. My gracious King, whom God and the saints preserve, leaves the appointment to me. It is at your service. I regret that I can offer you no higher rank. I shall be glad to have you in my command," he went on. "It is meet and right that you should be there. I and my house have been well served for generations by your house."

"I regret that I cannot accept your offer."

"Why not?" asked the Marquis haughtily. "It is not to every wandering officer that I would have made it."

"I should have to swear allegiance to your King, monsieur, and that I----"

"Enough," said the Marquis imperiously. "The offer is withdrawn. You may go, sir."

"I have a duty to discharge before I avail myself of your courteous permission," said the young man firmly.

"My uncle," said the girl, "you cannot dismiss Monsieur Jean Marteau in that cavalier fashion. It is due to him that I am here."

"No, curse me, Marquis," burst out Sir Gervaise, wagging his big head at the tall, French noble, "you don't know how much you owe to that young man. Why, even I would not have been here but for him."

"I am deeply sensible to the obligations under which he has laid me, both through the Comtesse Laure, and through you, old friend. I have just endeavored to discharge them. If there be any other way---- Monsieur is recently from prison--perhaps the state of his finances--if he would permit me----" continued the Marquis, who was not without generous impulses, it seemed.

"Sir," interrupted Marteau, "I thank you, but I came here to confer, not to receive, benefits."

"To confer, monsieur?"

"We Marteaux have been accustomed to render service, as the Marquis will recollect," he said proudly.

He drew forth a soiled, worn packet of papers. Because they had represented nothing of value to his captors they had not been taken. They had never left his person except during his long period of illness, when they had been preserved by a faithful official of the hospital and returned to him afterward.

"Allow me to return these to the Marquis," he said, tendering them.

"And what are these?" asked the old man.

"The title deeds to the Aumenier estates, monsieur."

"The grant is waste paper," said the Marquis contemptuously.

"Not so," was the quick answer. "I have learned that the acts of the late--of--those which were duly and properly registered before the--present king ascended the throne are valid. The estates are legally mine. You reject them. I----" he hesitated, he stepped over to the young woman--"I return them to you, mademoiselle. Her dowry, monsieur," he added, facing the Englishman, as he laid the packet down on the table by the side of the Countess Laure.

"Well, that's handsome of you," said the latter heartily.

"I cannot take them," ejaculated the young woman, just a touch of contempt for her obtuse English lover in her voice. "I---- They are legally his. We shall have no need----"

"Nonsense," burst out the young English officer. "They are rightfully yours. They were taken from you by an usurper who----"

"Monsieur!" cried Marteau sharply.

"Well, sir?"

"He who cannot be named by order of the king is not to be slandered by order of----"

"Whose order?"

"Mine," said Marteau.

"Indeed," answered the Englishman, his face flushing as he laid his hand on his sword--he was wearing his uniform.

"Steady, steady," cried the old Baronet, interposing between the two. "The lad's right. If we can't name Bonaparte, it is only fair that we shouldn't abuse him. And the girl's right, too. You have no need of any such dowry. Thank God I have got acres and pounds of my own for the two of you and all that may come after."

"It strikes me, gentlemen," said the Marquis coolly, "that the disposal of the affair is mine. Marteau is right and I was wrong. Perhaps he has some claim to the estate. But, however that may be, he does well to surrender it to its ancient overlord. I accept it as my due. I shall see that he does not suffer for his generosity."

"And does monsieur think that he could compensate me if he should give me the whole of France for the loss of--
_"

"Good God!" said the keen witted, keen eyed old Marquis, seeing Marteau's glance toward the young woman. "Are you still presuming to----"

"As man looks toward the sun that gives him life," said the young Frenchman, "so I look toward mademoiselle. But have no fear, monsieur," he went on to the English dragoon, "you have won her heart. I envy you but----"

"Marteau!" protested the Countess, the anguish in her soul speaking in her voice again.

How different the appearance of this slender, pale, delicate young Frenchman from the coarser-grained English soldier to whom she had plighted her troth, but to whom she had not given her heart. There was no doubt in her mind as to where her affections pointed. Some of the pride of race, of high birth and ancient lineage, had been blown away in the dust of the revolution. She had played too long with the plain people on the ancient estate. She had been left too much to herself. She had seen Marteau in splendid and heroic roles. She saw him so now. She had been his companion and associate in her youth. But of all this none knew, and she was fain not to admit it even to herself.

"Have you anything more to communicate, Marteau, or to surrender?" asked the Marquis coldly.

To do him justice, any service Marteau might render him was quite in accord with the old noble's idea of what was proper and with the ancient feudal custom by which the one family had served the other for so long.

"I have yet something else to give up."

"Another estate?"

"A title."

"Ah, and what title, pray, and what interest have I in it?" asked the Marquis sarcastically.

"I have here," said the young Frenchman, drawing forth another legal document, "a patent of nobility duly signed and attested. It was delivered to me by special courier the day after the battle of Montereau."

"And you were created what, sir?"

"Count d'Aumenier, at your service, monsieur."

"Is this an insult?" exclaimed the Marquis, his pale face reddening.

"Sir," said the young man proudly, "it was given me by a man who has made more men noble, and established them, than all the kings of France before him. No power on earth could better make me Count or Prince or King, even."

"Sir! Sir!" protested the Marquis furiously.

"I value this gift but I do not need it now. I surrender it into your hands. You may destroy it. I shall formally and before a notary renounce it. It shall be as if it had not been."

The Marquis took the paper, unfolded it deliberately amid a breathless silence and glanced rapidly over it.

"Even so," he admitted.

He looked up at the gallant, magnanimous young Frenchman with more interest and more care than before; he noticed how pale and haggard and weak he appeared. He appreciated it for the first time. A little change came over the hard, stern face of the old noble. He, too, had suffered; he, too, had been hungry and weak and weary; he, too, had eaten his heart out longing for what seemed impossible. After all, they had been friends and more than friends, these ancient houses, the high born and the peasant born, for many generations.

"St. Laurent," he said sharply, "we have been remiss. Monsieur is ill, a chair for him. Laure, a glass of wine."

Indeed, the constraint that Marteau had put upon himself had drawn heavily upon his scanty reserve of nervous force. St. Laurent did not like the task, but there was that in the Marquis's voice which warned him not to hesitate. He offered a chair, into which the young man sank. From a decanter on the table the girl, her hand trembling, poured out a glass of wine. Swiftly she approached him, she bent over him, moved by a sudden impulse, she sank on her knees by his side and tendered him the glass.

"On your knees, Laure!" protested the young Englishman. "It is not meet that----"

"In gratitude to a man who has served me well and who has set us all a noble example of renunciation by his surrender of land and title here in this very room."

"Rise, mademoiselle," said Marteau, taking the glass from her still trembling hand. "The honor is too great for me. I cannot remain seated unless----"

"Very pretty," said the Marquis coolly as young Captain Yeovil helped his reluctant young betrothed to her feet. "Your health, monsieur," he continued, taking up his own glass. "By all the saints, sir," he added as he drained his glass, "you have acted quite like a gentleman."

"Quite, my uncle?" quoted the young woman with deep emphasis on the word.

"Well, what more could I say to a Marteau?"

"What more indeed," said the young officer, smiling in proud disdain.

"Damme if I wouldn't have left the 'quite' out," muttered the elder Yeovil.

"I have your leave to withdraw now, monsieur?" asked the young officer. "You dismissed me a moment since."

"Now I ask you to stay. By the cross of St. Louis," said the old Marquis, fingering his order, "I am proud of you, young man. Take the commission. I should like them to see what sort of men we breed in Champagne and----"

"I feel I shall be unequal to it. I must withdraw."

"Where are you staying?" asked the young woman eagerly.

"With Major Lestoype, an old comrade."

"And I shall see you once more?"

"I cannot hope to see mademoiselle again. Our ways lie apart."

"Enough," said the Countess imperiously. "It rests with me and I will see you again. Meanwhile, au revoir."

She offered her hand to the young Frenchman. He seized it eagerly.

"Monsieur allows the privilege to an old and faithful servitor?" he said to the young Englishman, who stood jealously looking on, and then, not waiting for an answer, he bent low and pressed his lips upon it.

Did that hand tremble in his own? Was there an upward movement as if to press it against his lips? He could not tell. He did not dare to speculate. The Countess closed her eyes and when she opened them again he was gone.

CHAPTER XIX

THE GREAT HONOR ROLL

At midnight, had there been anyone abroad in the garrison to observe them, a number of men, heavily cloaked, might have been seen drifting through the torrential rain that was falling, toward the quarters occupied by Major Lestoype. They were expected, evidently, for they were admitted without hesitation by the carefully selected old soldiers who kept the door. The usual servants had been dismissed to their quarters, and their places were taken by certain tried and trusted veterans of the regiment.

In the quarters of Major Lestoype was a spacious and lofty hall. Thither the new arrivals were conducted. There was an air of great secrecy about their movements. The occasion was evidently felt to be a solemn one by all. Major Lestoype was not yet present. As they threw off their cloaks it was seen that they were soldiers of the Fifth regiment of the line, to continue to give it the familiar title. Each one was arrayed in his best parade uniform. They were of every

rank below that of Major, and included among them were several non-commissioned officers and a few private soldiers of reputation and standing. The men were of all ages too, although the non-commissioned officers and privates were, in every instance, veterans. These last stood in a little group by themselves, although there was no attempt on the part of the officers to emphasize any difference in rank on such an occasion.

There were, perhaps, a hundred men in the company when all had been assembled. They had been chosen with the utmost care. The list included all the officers, except certain new officers who had been assigned to the regiment from other regiments of whom Major Lestoype and the veteran captains were not sure. Certain other young officers, sons or connections of influential royalists now in high favor with King Louis XVIII, who had also been assigned to the regiment were of course excluded.

Those who were there were known men, all tried and true. Major Lestoype himself had been a private when the Fifth-of-the-Line had followed the Emperor, then but General Bonaparte, into Italy on that first and most marvelous of the campaigns of the great Captain. He had seen service in Egypt and had been present with the First Consul at the decisive battle at Marengo. Into his hand as a non-commissioned officer thereafter the newly made Emperor had delivered the Eagle. Naturally, he experienced toward it almost the feeling of a father for his child.

Every other man there was associated in some way with that imperial emblem, their regimental standard. As has been said, it was not the flag for which they cared; flags were of perishable silk or cloth; they could be and often were destroyed in battle. They could be replaced. Some regiments stripped the colors from the poles before they went into action. It was the Eagle that was precious and to be defended. It was the Eagle that was in their hearts almost eternal.

It was to receive their Eagle again that these officers and men had been summoned. They did not know that definitely yet, but some whisper of it had been in the air. They were on the *qui vive* for the developments of the evening and full of restless excitement. When the great door was at last thrown open and the Senior Captain caught sight of the tall, lean figure of his commander, he instantly came to attention and said sharply:

"Gentlemen, attention. The Major Commanding."

To be sure, Lestoype no longer occupied that position. His place had been taken by the Marquis d'Aumenier, but in the mind of the Senior Captain and of the others the old Major still was supreme and he said the words quite naturally.

The talking ceased at once, the well-drilled officers and men stood at attention, their hands raised in salute. Major Lestoype in full uniform, his breast bright with all his medals and orders--and it was observable that everybody else had adorned himself with every decoration he possessed, even those that had become illegal and valueless, forbidden even, after the fall of the Empire--entered the room, acknowledged the salutes and bowed ceremoniously to the officers assembled. He was followed by a tall slender young man on this occasion dressed again in the uniform of the regiment.

And yet there was a difference between this stranger and the other officers. While from the uniforms of the other officers had been carefully removed everything which in the least degree suggested the Empire, no such deletion had taken place with the equipment of the young man. On the contrary, the buttons, the brasses, the braids, the tricolored cockade; in short, everything was just as it was before the restoration.

The eyes of the soldiers gleamed as they immediately recognized the difference. They looked upon him with a certain envy, because he so boldly sported that of which they were deprived. At first they did not recognize the man who had the hardihood thus to display the insignia of Napoleon in the kingdom of Louis. It was not until he had advanced further in the room and stood in the full light of the chandelier and Major Lestoype turned toward him that one of the veterans recognized him.

"By the living God," cried a deep voice, "Marteau!"

Instantly the name was caught up.

"Marteau! Marteau! Marteau!" came from all parts of the room.

"Gentlemen, comrades," said Lestoype, raising his hand, "I beseech you, silence. Walls have ears. Every man here is tried and true. We are trusting our lives and honor to one another, but what may be outside I know not. We must do nothing to attract any attention. Therefore, restrain yourselves, I beg. Captain Marteau, for it is indeed he, gentlemen, has brought back to the regiment----"

He paused a moment, with an instinctive feeling for the dramatic. Perhaps the little scene had been prearranged. Marteau had carried his hand behind his back. As Lestoype stopped he brought his hand to the front of his body. There in the light of the candles, from the great chandelier above, the officers and soldiers saw the thing which they venerated next to God. For a moment they stared, almost aghast at the gilded emblem in Marteau's hand. Eyes sparkled in some faces, brimmed with tears in others, cheeks paled on one hand and flushed upon the other; breaths came quicker, a low murmur ran through the room—almost terrible in its meaning.

"The Eagle of the regiment, messieurs," said old Lestoype solemnly, breaking the silence.

"*Vive l'Empereur!*" suddenly exclaimed a veteran port-aigle, or standard bearer, in a low but tense voice, and the mighty battle-cry swept softly through the room from man to man, in low notes, in broken whispers like a great wavering sigh from a multitude of throbbing hearts.

"Is it the same?" asked one as the sound died away.

"The very same," answered Lestoype. "It was given into my hands years ago. I had someone write down the Emperor's words then. I committed them to memory. I can hear him speak now."

"And what were those words we ask you, we, who are young in the regiment," broke out a youth who was yet a veteran of the German campaign of 1813.

"The Emperor, turning to Marshal Berthier, took the Eagle from him, he held it up thus in his own hands."

Lestoype turned to Marteau and suited the gesture to the word. He seized the Eagle and advanced a step and those who watched him so keenly noticed how he trembled. It was to him as if the Emperor were there again. Some mystic aura of his mighty presence seemed to overhang the uplifted Eagle.

"Gentlemen, we were paraded on the Champ de Mars with thousands of others. The Eagles had been marched along the line with the ruffles of drums and blare of bugles. It was raining like tonight, there was no sun, but never saw I a brighter day. The Emperor said:

"Soldiers of the Fifth regiment of Infantry of the Line, I entrust to you the Eagle of France. It is to serve to you ever as your rallying point. You swear to me never to abandon it but with life? You swear never to suffer an affront to it for the honor of France? You swear ever to prefer death to dishonor for it? You swear?"

As the words of the old officer died away, moved by a common impulse, the hands of the men before him went to their swords. With sweeping gestures they dragged them out of their sheaths, up into the air they heaved the shining blades.

"We swear," they said solemnly, instinctively repeating the ceremony of the past in which some of them had participated and of which all had heard.

As their words died away the gruff voices of the non-commissioned officers and privates standing at salute repeated the acclaim, in accordance with the custom.

"It was so when the Eagle was given," said old Lestoype, deeply gratified by the spontaneous tribute. "Gentlemen and comrades, be seated, if you please. I have called you here for the honor of the regiment to consult as to what is to be done."

"*Mon Commandant,*" said an old veteran, stepping forward as those present sought seats where they could, "I was port-aigle of the regiment before Dresden. May I not take in my hand again the 'cou-cou'?"

That was the cant name which the soldiers gave to the standard, a term of affection, of familiarity, of comradeship which in no way indicated any lack of respect or any diminution of determination to die for it if necessary.

"To you I gladly commit it until we have determined what is to be done with it," said Lestoype, handing it to the old man.

It seemed a perfectly natural and spontaneous act to the officers present when the port-aigle pressed his lips reverently upon the number plate below the feet of the Eagle and then, disdaining to sit down, stood at attention, holding it before him.

"Will you not tell us, Mon Commandant," said another of the younger officers, "something more about the Eagle before we discuss its disposition?"

"I was a Sub-Lieutenant at Austerlitz," said Lestoype, only too anxious to comply. "We were under the command of Marshal Soult, club-footed Soult we called him, upon the heights of Pratzen. In the advance we were overwhelmed. The port-aigle was killed. I was close at hand. I seized the staff but a bullet got me in the shoulder, here. My arm has been stiff ever since. I fell--a Russian--we were that closely intermingled and fighting hand to hand--seized the staff. I lapsed into unconsciousness. Captain Grenier--you were Sergeant-Major then--finish the story."

"Willingly, Major Lestoype. I cut down that Russian, although wounded myself, and tore the staff from him as he fell. But I couldn't hold it. I fell with it at your feet. Our men had been driven back. There was nobody beside us but the regimental dog."

"Mustache," said one of the other officers, and all eyes turned toward the stuffed skin of a mongrel poodle dog mounted in a glass case hung against the wall. Hands went up in salute. Some of the soldiers laughed grimly.

"The brave Mustache," continued Grenier. "He leaped over my prostrate body. I was conscious still. I saw it all. I would have given worlds for strength, but I was helpless. Still Mustache was enough. He loved the port-aigle. He seemed to know the Eagle was in danger. He snapped at the hands of the Russian. The man drew back and cut at him with his sword. Perhaps I should have received that blow. You see where the forepaw of the dog was sliced off? But he had the spirit of a French soldier, that brave dog, and he kept them off until the regiment rallied and came back and drove away the Russians. Marshal Lannes had a collar made for Mustache. You can see it there around his neck, young gentlemen," continued the old Captain. "On one side the inscription reads: '*He lost a leg in the battle of Austerlitz but he saved the Eagle of his regiment.*' On the other side: '*Mustache, a dog of France, who will be everywhere respected and honored as a brave soldier.*'"

"What became of the dog?" asked another.

"He was carried on the roll of the regiment until he was killed by an English cannon ball at Badajos. We took the skin and it is there, but we buried the brave heart and the rest of him on the rampart where he fell. The soldiers put up a stone above him. 'Here lies the brave Mustache,' it read. I think the English left it standing."

"That Eagle has been in every capital of Europe, messieurs," remarked another veteran. "Rome, Berlin, Vienna, Madrid, Moscow."

"It charged with the Guard at Eylau," said Drehon. "You remember, comrades, some of you at least, how we went forward in support of the battalions of the Guard under General Dorsenne?"

"I remember, I remember," came from one and another.

"*Hein*," said a veteran, "he was a bold soldier."

"And a handsome one. They called him '*Le Beau Dorsenne*,'" continued Drehon. "The Guard advanced at arms-
aport and so did we. Our drums and theirs were rolling *La Grenadiere*. One of his staff said to him as we drew near the ranks of the Russians, 'Hadn't we better begin firing, my General?' 'No,' said the proud Dorsenne haughtily. 'Grenadiers keep your arms apart,' he continued as he saw some wavering. 'The old guard only fights at the point of the bayonet.'"

"And what happened?"

"The Russians seemed to be paralyzed. They stood and watched us. When they finally did fire, in their excitement, they overshot us. The next instant we burst upon them. Our bayonets came down to a charge. They couldn't stand before us, comrades. Corbleu! the white snow was red with blood that day! A squadron of cavalry, the Emperor's escort, struck them in the rear at the same time and between us we cut them to pieces. They were heavy, those big Russians, to toss on the bayonet, but we did it."

"Was that when the Emperor called us 'The Terrible Fifth'?" queried a voice.

"That was the time."

"Tell us more," came from the excited assemblage.

"They gave us the gold wreath, there in Paris, after Jena and Eylau and Friedland. They loved the Eagle then,

those Parisians," said Adjutant Suraif, taking up the tale. "The women fell on our necks and kissed us when we came marching back. They threw us flowers. They opened their arms to us. They gave us wine. Ah, that was fine."

"At Ratisbon," said the old Major, "I commanded the regiment at the bridge-head. We fought the Austrians off all day, giving the Emperor time to make his dispositions. We captured four hundred prisoners, an Austrian battle flag, and three other flags. The firing was terrible, our cou-cou lost some leaves of his wreath there. We were alone there and at nightfall our ammunition was all gone. The Austrians were there in thousands. They charged and overwhelmed us."

"But the Eagle?"

"Ah, we had taken precaution," laughed the old Major. "We wrapped the 'cou-cou' up in the Austrian standard and in the battle flags and buried it in a cellar, so when they captured us they got nothing but the men and, of course, we didn't matter."

"And how did you get it back?" came an excited question.

"The Emperor took the town the day after. They had kept us prisoners there and so we were free. I shall never forget the Emperor on that day. He rode down to us where we had formed in ranks. He looked over us. His glance pierced every man's heart. 'Soldiers of the Fifth,' he said, 'when I heard of the attack on the bridge at Ratisbon I said to my staff, 'I am tranquil, the Terrible Fifth is there,' and now I see you alive, many of you unharmed, and without your Eagle. What have you done with it?' he thundered out his face black as midnight. 'Sire,' said I, stepping forward and upon my word, comrades, it took more courage to face the Emperor in that mood than to charge an Austrian battery, 'we have not lost our Eagle. We have buried it and having been but this instant released from captivity by your Majesty, we await your permission to dig it up.' 'Go and resurrect it,' he said sharply. 'I will wait.'"

"And did he?"

"Most assuredly. We found it safe and brought it back with the Austrian standard. The Emperor saluted it and commended us. 'I knew I could trust you,' he said, smiling."

"He loved his Eagles," said another voice.

"That did he," answered a veteran. "I have even seen him get out of his traveling-carriage and stand at attention as an Eagle at the head of a regiment marched by."

"I carried the Eagle in Marshal Macdonald's column at Wagram, messieurs," said the old Eagle-bearer, stepping forward. "It was there the bullet struck the wing tip, here." He laid his hand tenderly upon it. "Mon Dieu, that was a march! Twenty thousand men in solid columns going across the plain at steady step, with drums beating, the Austrians pouring shot and shell into us. You could hear the bullets crash through the breasts of the division like glass. My arm was numb from the bullet which struck the Eagle, but I changed hands and carried it forward. I can see the big Marshal still. The Emperor was looking on. It was terrible. It didn't seem that mortal man could make it, but we kept on, still, silent, until we came in touch with the Austrians and then we cut them in two. It was magnificent."

"I was with Marshal Mortier when we were caught in the pass of Durrenstein," broke out one of the privates, an old Eagle-guard. "We fought all day and all night in that trap against awful odds, waiting, hoping, until toward morning we heard the thunder of Dupont's guns. We were so close together that we seized the throats of the Russians, and they ours. We begged the Marshal to use a boat we had found to cross over the Danube and escape. 'No,' he said, 'certainly not! I will not desert my brave comrades! I will save them or die with them.' Ah, he was a brave man that day."

"And that such a man could betray the Emperor!" exclaimed another.

"I never could understand it," said one of the soldiers.

"That was the day," said a third, "when our drums were shot to pieces and we had to beat the long roll on the iron cooking cans."

"You remember it well, comrade."

"I was a drummer there. I remember there were but two thousand of the six thousand in the division that answered roll call that day."

"I carried that Eagle into Moscow," said a scarred, one-armed veteran. "I would have carried it back, but I was

wounded at Malojaraslavets and would have died but for you, my friend."

"And I carried it across the Niemen after that retreat was over," returned the other, acknowledging the generous tribute of his old fellow soldier.

"Sacre-bleu! How cold it was. Not many of you can remember that march because so few survived it. The battalions in Spain can thank God they escaped it," said another.

"It was hot enough there, and those English gave us plenty of fighting," added one of the veterans who had fought against Wellington.

"Aye, that they did, I'll warrant," continued the veteran of Russia. "The Emperor who marched on foot with the rest of us. Before crossing the Beresina--I shudder to think of the thousands drowned then. I dream about it sometimes at night--we were ordered to break up the Eagles and throw them into the river."

"And did you?"

"Not I. That is the only order I disobeyed. I carried it with me, wrapped in my own clothes. One night my fingers froze to it. See!" He lifted his maimed hands. "But I held on. I crossed the Nieman before Marshal Ney. He threw away his musket, but I kept the Eagle. He was the last man, I was just before him," said the man proudly.

"It was Marteau who saved it at Leipsic," said Lestoype, "and again after he had hurled it into the Aube at Arcis he found it and brought it back. And it is here."

Tears glistened in the eyes of the veterans and the youth alike. Hearts beat more rapidly, breaths came quicker, as these brave and fragmentary reminiscences of the part the Eagle had played in past glories were recited.

"What shall we do with it now?" asked Lestoype at last.

CHAPTER XX

WHEN THE VIOLETS BLOOM AGAIN

Now there was not a man in the room who had not heard of the order to return the Eagles to Paris, where they were to be broken up and melted down, not a man in the army for that matter. Nor was there a man who had not heard some account of the resistance of other regiments to the order, which had been nevertheless enforced wherever possible, although in cases not a few Eagles had been hidden or disappeared mysteriously and had not been given up. There was scarcely a man in the regiment--unless some royalist officer or new recruit--who had not been glad that their own Eagle had been lost honorably in battle and buried, as they believed, in the river. It was more fitting that it should meet that end than be turned back to Paris to be broken up, melted down and cast into metal for ignoble use--and any other use would be ignoble in the estimation of the regiment.

"I would rather throw it into the Isere," growled old Grenier, "than send it back."

"And I, and I, and I," came from different voices.

"Perhaps," said Lestoype, speaking slowly and with deep meaning, for he realized that his words were in the highest degree treasonable, "if we can preserve it by some means we may see it once again at the head of the regiment when----" he stopped. The silence was positively ghastly. He looked about him. The men thrilled to his glance. "----'when the violets bloom again,'" he said, using the mystic poetic phrase which had become so widely current.

"God speed the day!" burst out some deep voiced veteran.

"Amen, amen!"

"*Vive l'Empereur!*"

"Let us save the Eagle!"

The whole room was in tumult of nervous cries.

"*Vive le brave Marteau!*" finally said Drehon when he could get a hearing. "He has given us back our honor, our life."

The emotions of the moment were too much. Reckless of what might happen, the room instantly rang with loud acclaim in response to this appeal. The soldiers sprang to their feet, moved by irresistible emotion. Swords were drawn again.

The officers and men clustered around Lestoype and Marteau. The Eagle was lifted high, blades were upheaved threateningly again. Dangers were forgotten. Intoxicated with enthusiasm they gave free course to their emotions.

"*Vive l'Empereur!*" resounded through the hall, not whispered but shouted, not shouted but roared!

In their mad frenzy of excitement they did not, any of them, notice that the door into the hall had been thrown open and that a young officer of the regiment stood there, his face pale with amazement, his mouth open, staring. He could not take in the whole purport of the scene but he saw the Eagle, he heard the cries, the word "*Vive*" came to him out of the tumult, coupled with the name of Marteau and the Emperor.

"Gentlemen!" he finally shouted, raising his voice to its highest pitch and as the sound penetrated to the tumultuous mass the noise died away almost as suddenly as it had arisen.

Men faced about and stared toward the entrance. There stood young St. Laurent, one of the royalist officers, newly appointed to the regiment, who had been made aide to the Governor and commander.

"Major Lestoype," said the youth with great firmness, having recovered his presence of mind and realizing instantly the full purport and menace of the situation, "an order from the Governor requests your presence at once. I was sent to deliver it. The soldiers at the door strove vainly to stop me but I forced my way past them. I am an unwelcome guest, I perceive, being a loyal servant of the King, but I am here. What is the meaning of this gathering, the worship of this discarded emblem, these treasonable cries?"

"Am I, a veteran of the army of Italy, to be catechised and questioned by a boy?" growled Lestoype in mingled rage and astonishment.

"You forget yourself, monsieur. I regret to fail in any military duty or in respect to my seniors, but in this I represent the Marquis d'Aumenier, the Governor, aye, even the King, my master. Whence came this Eagle?"

There was a dead silence.

"I brought it, monsieur, to my old comrades, to my old regiment," coolly said Marteau, stepping forward.

"Traitor!" exclaimed St. Laurent, confronting him boldly.

"Not so, for I have taken no oath to King Louis."

"Ah, you still wear the insignia of the Corsican, I see," continued the young aide, looking more closely. "But how about these gentlemen?"

Again the question was met by silence.

"Messieurs," said St. Laurent, "you are old soldiers of the former Emperor. I see. I understand. You love him as I and mine the King. It is as much as my life is worth, as much as my honor, to condone it. Yet I would not be a tale-bearer, but this cannot pass unless----"

"Shall I cut him down where he stands, *Mon Commandant?*" growled the old port-aigle, presenting his weapon.

"And add murder to treason!" exclaimed St. Laurent, his face flushing a little but not giving back an inch before the threatening approach of the veteran.

There was good stuff in him, evidently, and even those who foresaw terrible consequences to themselves in his unexpected presence could not but admire him. They were even proud that he was a Frenchman, even though he served the King they hated.

"By no means," said Lestoype, motioning the color-bearer back. "You shall go as freely as you came."

"And if you do as I suggest I shall go and forget all I have seen, messieurs."

"Impossible!"

"Upon my honor I shall do it but on one condition."

"Ah! and that is?"

"That you give me the Eagle."

"Give you the Eagle!" exclaimed old Captain Grenier.

"The Eagle for which our brave comrades died," said Drehon.

"The Eagle which has been carried in triumph in every capital in Europe!" added Suraif.

The whole room was filled with cries again.

"Never! Never!"

The whole mass surged forward, including Marteau.

"Was it to give it up to any servant of King Louis that I brought it back?" the latter shouted threateningly.

"Gentlemen," said the young aide so soon as he could make himself heard in the tumult, "the choice is yours, not mine. I am a soldier of the King, aide-de-camp to the Governor of this place, an officer under the Marquis d'Aumenier. You have your ideas of duty, I have mine. I have already stretched my conscience to the limit in offering to be silent about this under any conditions. I am doing wrong in concealing it but I do not wish to doom so many brave men to disgrace, to death. You, monsieur"--he pointed toward Marteau--"refused a commission in this regiment. You wear the insignia of Bonaparte. You have no place here. Withdraw. Your arrival has disturbed the orderly course of events. These gentlemen were doing their duty contentedly----"

"No, by God, never," roared out a veteran. "Contentedly! We will never be content until----"

"Until what, monsieur?"

"Until the violets bloom again," came the answer, accompanied by a burst of sardonic laughter.

"Your interest in the flowers of spring does not concern me, gentlemen," returned the young aide, affecting not to understand, and perhaps he did not. "If you will give me the Eagle----"

"And what will you do with it if we should do so?"

"I will be silent as to this."

"And how will you explain your possession of it?"

"I will say that I got it from Monsieur Marteau, who has gone."

"And what will you do with it?"

"That shall be as the Marquis d'Aumenier directs."

"And he?"

"I think he will undoubtedly obey the orders of the Minister of War and send it to Paris to be broken up."

"Gentlemen," said Major Lestoype, endeavoring to quiet and repress the growls of antagonism that arose on every hand, "you hear the proposition of Monsieur St. Laurent. Seeing his duty as he does, I am forced to admit," continued the veteran with great magnanimity, "that it does credit to his heart. What shall we do?"

"Purchase our freedom, purchase our rank, purchase our lives by giving up our Eagle!" said old Captain Grenier.

"Never!"

"I vote NO to that proposition," said Drehon.

"And I, and I, and I," acclaimed the soldiers.

"You hear, Monsieur St. Laurent?" said the Major. "These gentlemen have signified their will unmistakably."

"I hear," said the young aide. "Major Lestoype, forgive me if I have failed in respect or soldierly deference to my superior officer, but I, too, have my duty to perform. I warn you all that when I pass from this room I shall go directly to the Marquis d'Aumenier and report what I have seen."

"When he passes," cried some of the soldiers of lower rank ominously, emphasizing the adverb and rudely thrusting themselves between St. Laurent and the door.

"Pardon me, gentlemen," said the young aide quite coolly. "It seems that I spoke unadvisedly in one particular."

"You retract?" said a voice.

"Never. I should have said 'if I pass.'"

Swords were still out, hands were clenched, arms were raised.

"Say the word and he dies where he stands," cried one.

"Gentlemen," said Lestoype sternly, "back, all of you. Free passage for Monsieur St. Laurent. Back, I say. Let him go unharmed, as he came."

"My orders were to request your presence before the Governor of the town immediately," said the aide.

"I attend him at once, young gentleman," returned the old soldier, seizing his cloak and covering his head with his chapeau. "Gentlemen," he added, turning to the rest, "I leave the Eagle in your hands. Before he departs let me say that Monsieur St. Laurent has borne himself like a brave man, a gallant officer, and a true gentleman. Monsieur, you will not take amiss this heartfelt tribute from so old a soldier as I."

"I thank you, sir, and you, gentlemen," said the young aide, surveying the men, their sudden temper abated, now looking at him with admiration, some of them with hands raised in salute. "The duty you have imposed upon me by your choice is the most painful I shall ever be called upon to perform."

"This way, Monsieur St. Laurent," said old Lestoype, stepping through the door with his head high, beckoning the young aide to follow him.

The door had scarcely closed behind the two when the wild confusion broke out again.

"What shall be done now?" cried Captain Grenier, the senior officer present, as soon as he could be heard.

"Messieurs," said Marteau, striving to gain the attention of all, "let me speak a moment. I have a plan. Be silent, I beg of you."

"We will hear Marteau."

"What have you to suggest?"

"Speak!"

"Be quick."

"This. I will take the Eagle, I, who brought it."

"You will throw it into the Isere?"

"No. I know this town like a book. The regiment was once stationed here for a few months. I had time on my hands. I explored many of the ancient buildings. I will---- But ask me nothing. Trust the Eagle to me. I have periled my

life for it as have you all. Trust it to me. It shall come to no dishonor in my hands. Say to the Governor that I came here, that I brought the Eagle, that I was asked to surrender it, that I refused, that I took it away, that you know not where I concealed it, nor whither I am gone. Let Monsieur St. Laurent make his report. You can simply tell the truth. Nothing will be done."

"It is well thought on," said Captain Grenier.

"The danger is to you," said another.

"What of that? I have looked danger in the face often since I have been in the army, like all the rest of you."

"I like not to shift the responsibility upon this young man," said the old port-aigle dubiously. "He is saving our lives at the risk of his own if they should find him--which is likely."

"Messieurs," said Marteau quickly, "I am not preserving your lives for yourselves."

"Why, then?" asked an officer.

"That you may be ready," said the young man, throwing his cloak about his shoulders, seizing the Eagle with his hands, "when the violets bloom again."

As they stared at him he saluted, turned on his heel, opened the door and went out.

CHAPTER XXI

LIKE A THIEF IN THE NIGHT

The reception was over. The last guest had departed. The house had been closed. Sir Gervaise Yeovil and his son and the Countess Laure had bidden the old Marquis good night and retired to their several apartments. There were wakeful hours ahead for the Governor, who repaired to his cabinet and got to work. The tidings which had been brought him by the young Baron St. Laurent were sufficiently grave and perturbing to render sleep impossible, even if he had nothing to do. In great astonishment the Marquis had questioned Major Lestoype closely and from him had received a frank and accurate version of the whole affair. The Major would have died rather than betray a comrade, but in this instance the betrayal had already been effected and there was nothing whatever to be gained, from Marteau's point of view or from anybody's point of view, by an attempt at concealment.

The old Marquis had acted with dazzling promptitude. His personal escort had consisted of a troop of loyalist cavalry from the King's household guard and it had not yet returned to Paris. He could depend absolutely upon these men. They had none of them been soldiers of the grand armies of the Emperor. They had been recruited in loyal and long-suffering Vendée. He placed them under the command of St. Laurent, of whose conduct he highly approved, being in ignorance of the offer of secrecy made by that young soldier, Lestoype being too fine a man to attempt to better his case by bringing the Lieutenant into disgrace. This detachment had searched the Major's quarters thoroughly. They had found them, of course, deserted.

Captain Grenier, being forthwith summoned to headquarters, had stated truthfully that Marteau had taken the Eagle and gone and thereafter the assembly had dispersed. He declared upon his word of honor that he had no knowledge where he had gone or what he had done with the Eagle. The Marquis had a complete description of Marteau drawn up and sent to every gate in the walled town. The guard was ordered to permit nobody and nothing to pass without the severest scrutiny and the closest search or inspection. The Governor made preparations for public proclamation on the morrow, offering a large reward for the fugitive's apprehension dead or alive, and also an additional reward for information that would lead to the discovery of the missing Eagle.

Promising himself to deal with the matter even more thoroughly in the morning, he had at last dismissed his subordinates and retired. If Marteau was within the city walls--and it was impossible to see how he could have got out of the town without a pass after twelve o'clock at night--he would find him if he had to search every house in the town. The spirit of the old man was high and aflame. To be so braved, to have his command the scene of such an outbreak of disloyalty and treason to the King was more than he could bear with equanimity.

There was another regiment in the town that had formerly been known as the Seventh-of-the-Line, commanded by Colonel Labedoyere, and there were detachments of artillery. The Eagle of the Seventh had never been sent to the War Office in Paris. It, too, had disappeared. But that had been months before the Marquis' time, and he had no responsibility for that. Colonel Labedoyere was more than suspected of lukewarmness, but as he was a young man of great influence, high social standing and much personal popularity no steps had as yet been taken against him. The Marquis determined to have it out with him also at the first convenient season, and unless he could be assured of his absolute devotion to King Louis, he would report to the Minister of War the necessity of the Colonel's removal.

The old man was fully alive to the Napoleonic sentiment among the soldiers, a sentiment which arose from a variety of motives. In the first place, war was the trade of most of the soldiers. They lived on it, thrived by it, delighted in it. The permanence of the monarchy meant peace. There would be little chance for advancement and none at all for plunder. Self-interest predisposed every old soldier to continue an imperialist.

In the second place, the finances of France were naturally in a most disordered condition. The pay of officers and men was greatly in arrears; promises made had not been kept, and there was much heart-felt dissatisfaction on that account. The pay of a soldier is in no sense an adequate compensation for the risks he runs, the perils to which he voluntarily and willingly subjects himself, but it is a universal experience that although his pay is in no degree commensurate, yet the soldier whose pay is withheld instantly becomes insubordinate and mutinous, however high or patriotic the motives back of his enlistment.

Again the officers had, most of them, been degraded in rank. Many of them had been retired on pittance which were not paid. Those who were lucky enough to be retained in active service were superseded by superannuated, often incompetent old officers of the old royal army before the revolution, or by young scions of nobility with no knowledge or fitness to command veterans, to whom the gross-bodied, uninspiring, gouty old King did not appeal. Again, the regimental names and associations had been changed and the old territorial or royal and princely designations had been reestablished; the Napoleonic victories had been erased from the battle-flags; the Eagles had been taken away.

The plain people of France were more or less apathetic toward Emperor or King. France had been drained of its best for so long that it craved rest and peace and time to recuperate above everything else. It had been sated with glory and was alike indifferent to victory or defeat. But the army was a seething mass of discontent. It had nothing to gain by the continuance of present conditions and everything to lose. It was a body of soldiers-of-fortune held in control temporarily by circumstances but ready to break the leash and respond instantly to the call of the greatest soldier-of-fortune of all.

And while all this is true it must also be admitted that there were many officers and men like Marteau who were profoundly humiliated and distressed over conditions in France and who, passionately wrapped up in and devoted to the Emperor, had spurned commissions and dignities and preferments. If they were obscure men they remained in France unnoticed; if they were great men they had expatriated themselves and sought seclusion and safety in other countries, oftentimes at great personal sacrifice of property, ease and comfort.

The King, who was by no means lacking in shrewdness and wit, and his chief advisers in Paris, did not fail to realize something of this, but keen-sighted men like the Marquis d'Aumenier, away from the person of the monarch, realized it much more fully, although even he had not the least idea of the wide extent and depth of this feeling. But the old man knew instinctively that he must control things in Grenoble at least with an iron hand and that no temporizing was possible. The return of Marteau, who was a man of parts and power, he admitted--he recalled how well he had borne himself before the little group in the drawing-room!--followed by the midnight gathering, the joy of the veterans, their worship almost of the Eagle, enlightened him. He would put down sedition with an iron hand, he swore to himself. The King had committed this important place to him. It was, in a certain sense, a frontier city if the impossible happened. Well, the King should find that he had not reposed trust in the Marquis for nothing.

So the old man thought as he lay sleepless during the night. He was not the only one who lay sleepless during the night. Laure d'Aumenier sought rest and oblivion in vain. She had been more moved by Marteau's conduct and bearing and presence in the old Chateau d'Aumenier, a year ago, than she had been willing to admit until she thought him dead. The Marteaux had always been a good-looking, self-respecting people. Madame Marteau, his mother, had been an unusual woman who had, it was said, married beneath her when she became the wife of old Jean Marteau, although she never in her long married life thought of it in that way. The present Jean Marteau was as handsome and distinguished looking a man as there was in France. The delicacy and refinement of his bearing and appearance did not connote weakness either, as she could testify.

The young woman owed her life and honor to the young soldier. But long before that chance meeting they had

been companions in childhood, intimate companions, too. The boy had been her servitor, but he had been more. He had been her protector and friend. In her memory she could recall incident after incident when he had helped her, shielded her. Never once had he failed to show anything but devotion absolute and unbounded toward her.

The proposition of marriage he had made in the old hall, which she had laughed to scorn, had by no means escaped her memory. She had dwelt upon it, she had even speculated upon the possibility of an acceptance of his proposal. Why not? She knew no man more gentle at heart, more gallant in soul, more noble in spirit than he. That, too, she had turned over and over in her mind.

She admired Frank Yeovil. He was a likable man, frank by nature as well as name and brave, sunny in disposition and ardently devoted to her. When the betrothal had been made at her uncle's urgent insistence that she accept Captain Yeovil's suit, it had been a great match for her, for the d'Aumeniers were impoverished exiles, while the Yeovils were a rich family and of a line almost as long as her own. It had been easy enough to plight her troth to the young Englishman at first, but since she had seen Marteau, she realized that it would not be easy to keep that engagement. Fortunately, Captain Yeovil had been on service in Spain and the South of France with the Duke of Wellington's army, and only a few weeks before had he joined her uncle and herself in Paris on leave of absence. He had pressed her to name the day but she had temporized and avoided the issue; not for any definite reason but because as the time drew near she became less and less willing to be the Englishman's wife.

Marteau had been reported killed at Arcis. Perhaps that report had done more to enlighten her to the true state of her affections than anything else. Her pride of birth, her rank and station would never have permitted her, it may be, to dwell upon a living Marteau as a possible husband, but since he was dead there could be no harm in dreams of that kind; and in her grief she had indulged herself in them to the full. It had been a shock to her, of course, but not so great a shock as it would have been if an engagement had subsisted between the two, or she had permitted herself to think that she could ever look favorably on the proposition he had made to her. Nevertheless, it had been a great sorrow. There were some alleviations to the situation, however. Since it had become impossible, since she believed Marteau dead, she could indulge her grief and her mind could dwell upon those attractions which had influenced her so powerfully.

The period was one of intense anxiety and excitement. The old Marquis had lived much alone. He was not versed in woman's ways. Her agitation and grief passed unnoticed. By degrees she got control of herself. Since it was not to be Marteau it might as well be young Yeovil. The whole episode with which the French officer was concerned she viewed from a point of detachment as a romantic dream. His arrival had rudely shattered that dream and awakened her to the reality of the situation. She loved him.

For Laure d'Aumenier to marry Marteau was impossible. The Marquis would never consent. He was her legal guardian, the head of her race. Marriage without his consent was unthinkable. Loving Marteau she would fain not marry Yeovil; yet her troth being plighted in the most public manner and with her consent, the Marquis would force her to keep her word. She knew exactly the pressure that would be brought to bear upon her. Although she had lost some of the pride of her ancestors, she could see the situation from their point of view. There was a deadlock before her and there appeared to be no way of breaking it.

It was a wild night outside. The rain beat upon the casement windows of the old castle. The tempest without seemed fit accompaniment to the tempest within, thought the woman.

A long time she lay thinking, planning, hoping, praying; alike unavailingly. Toward morning, utterly exhausted by the violence of her emotions, the scene she had gone through--and it had been a torture to stand and receive the townspeople after the departure of Marteau--she fell at last into a troubled sleep.

She was awakened by a slight sound, as of a light footstep. She enjoyed the faculty of awakening with full command of her senses at once. She parted the curtains of the bed. With her eyes wide open, holding her breath, she listened. She heard soft movements. There was someone in the room!

Laure d'Aumenier, as has been said, had been trained to self-reliance. She could wield a sword expertly and was an accurate shot with a firearm. She could ride with any woman in England. She had, in full, the intrepidity and courage of her ancestors. Her prowess, so strange and so unusual in that day in a woman, had been a subject of disapproval on the part of her uncle, but Sir Gervaise Yeovil and his son had viewed it with delight. Frank Yeovil had brought her from Spain a beautiful Toledo blade and a pair of Spanish dueling pistols, light, easily handled and of deadly accuracy. The blade hung from a peg in the wall by the head of her bed. The pistols lay in a case on the table upon which her lighted bedroom candle stood. They were charged and ready for use.

Throwing back the cover without a sound, presently she stepped through the hangings and out on the floor. A loose wrapper lay at the foot of the bed, which was a tall old four-poster, heavily curtained. Whoever was in the room was on the other side of the bed, near the wall. The curtains hung between.

She was as light as a bird in her movements. She drew the bed-gown nearer, thrust her feet into heelless slippers, placed convenient for her morning rising by her maid, opened the box of pistols, lifted one of them, examining it on the instant to see that it was ready for use, slipped on the wrapper, stepped toward the foot of the bed and waited.

The beat of the rain, the shriek of the wind, the roar of the thunder filled the room with sound, but the woman had good ears and they were well trained. She could hear someone softly moving. Sometimes, in lulls in the storm, she thought she could detect heavy breathing.

The natural impulse of the ordinary woman would have been to scream or if not that, having gained the floor, to rush to the door, or if not that to pull the bell cord and summon help. But Laure d'Aumenier was not an ordinary woman. She knew that any sound would bring aid and rescue at once. There would be plenty of time to scream, to pull the bell or to do whatever was necessary later. And something, she could not tell what, something she could not recognize, impelled her to take the course she did; to wait, armed.

But the wait began to tell on her sensibilities. The sound of somebody or something moving mysteriously to-and-fro behind the curtains over against the wall at the other end of the room began to work on her nerves. It takes an iron steadiness, a passive capacity for endurance which is quite different from woman's more or less emotional courage, to wait under circumstances like that.

Just when she had reached the limit of her endurance and was persuaded that she could stand no more, her attention was attracted by a slight click as of a lock or catch, a movement as of something heavy, as of a drawer or door, and then the footsteps turned and came toward the window. The moment of action had arrived and with it came the return of her wavering courage.

To reach the window the intruder must pass by the foot of the bed where she stood. Now the light was on the table at the head of the bed and the table was far enough from the bed to shine past her into the room. The moving figure suddenly came into view. It was a man, shrouded in a heavy cloak. He did not glance toward the bed. His eyes were fixed on the window. His astonishment, therefore, was overwhelming when he suddenly found himself looking into the barrel of a pistol and confronted by a woman.

CHAPTER XXII

IN THE COUNTESS LAURE'S BED-CHAMBER

That astonishment was so great when the man recognized the woman that he threw up his hands and stepped backward. As he did so his sodden cloak, which he had gathered closely around him, opened and fell. The next instant his hand tore his hat from his head and he stood revealed in the full light of the candle.

"Marteau!" exclaimed the woman in a surprise and dismay equal to that of the man she confronted.

Her arm that held the pistol dropped weakly to her side. With the other hand she drew the peignoir about her, a vivid crimson wave rushed over her whole body. To surprise a man, a thief, in her room at night, was one thing; to confront the man she loved in such a guise was another. Her heart rose in her throat. For a moment she thought she would have fainted.

"You! You!" she choked out brokenly. "Mon Dieu!"

"Mademoiselle," began the man desperately, his confusion and dismay growing with every flying moment, "I----"

"What do you here," she went on impetuously, finding voice, "in my bedroom at night? I thought you----"

"For God's sake hear me. I came to----" and then he stopped lamely and in agonized embarrassment.

"For what did you come?" she insisted.

"Mademoiselle," he said, throwing his head up, "I cannot tell you. But when I was stationed here before this was the bedroom of the Commanding-Officer. I supposed it was so still. I had not the faintest idea that you--that it was----"

"And what would you do in the bedroom of the Commanding-Officer?" asked the woman, forgetting for the moment the strangeness of the situation in her anxiety to solve the problem.

"And that, I repeat, I cannot tell."

"Not even to me, who----" she stopped in turn.

"Yes, yes, go on," urged the young man, stepping nearer to her. "Not even to you who----"

"Who espoused your cause in the hall this very night, who befriended you," she went on rather lamely and inadequately having checked herself in time.

"Oh," said the young officer in great disappointment, "that?"

"Yes."

"You see, the Governor----"

"Did you wish to kill him?"

"Mademoiselle!" he protested. "I swear to you that I would not harm him for the world but I----"

"Are you in need? He offered you money. I have a few resources."

"For God's sake, mademoiselle," interposed the officer desperately, but she went resolutely on.

"Whatever I have is yours. See----" she stripped rings from her fingers and proffered them--"take them."

"Mademoiselle," said the young man sadly, "you wrong me."

"Well, if it was not for murder or for gain, for what cause did you take so frightful a risk?"

"Is there no other motive, mademoiselle, that makes men risk their lives than revenge or greed?"

"What do you mean?"

"Love."

"But you said you did not know this was my room!"

The words came from her impetuously and before she thought she realized when it was too late.

"Ah, mademoiselle, love of woman is a great passion. I know it only too well, too sadly. But it is not the only love."

"Have you another in your heart?" asked the Countess with a sinking in her own.

"Love of honor."

"I don't understand."

"And yet I know that you are the very soul of honor yourself."

"I thank you, but----"

"Mademoiselle," said the young man, coming to a sudden resolution, "appearances are frightfully against me. That I should be here, in your room, at this hour of the night, under the circumstances, condemns me utterly in your opinion, especially as I have offered no adequate explanation. I am about to throw myself on your mercy, to trust to your honor."

"You shall not trust in vain, monsieur."

"I know that. I trusted to your honor in the Chateau d'Aumenier and you did not fail me then."

"Nor will I now."

"Will you give me your word not to reveal what I tell you, and not to make use of the knowledge I communicate, until I give you leave?"

"Does it concern the honor or the welfare of those I love?"

"You mean that Englishman?"

"I do not love--I mean the Marquis, my uncle."

"It does not," said the young man, noting with throbbing heart the broken sentence.

"Then I give my promise. Speak."

"I came here to conceal something, mademoiselle."

"What?"

"An emblem."

"Yours?"

"The Emperor's."

"You mean----"

"The Eagle of the Fifth-regiment-of-the-Line."

"Why here?"

"It is a long story. I brought it back, having fished it out of the river Aube, where it had lain since that day----"

"When I thought you killed," said the young woman, her hand pressed to her heart.

"And were you sorry?"

"Sorry? I--- But go on."

"I showed it to the officers of the regiment tonight at Major Lestoype's quarters. We were discovered. The matter was reported to your uncle. Rather than give up the Eagle I said that I would hide it."

"And why here?"

"Because being as I thought the quarters of the Commanding-Officer it would be the last place in Grenoble where it would be sought."

"And where did you hide it?"

"Back of one of the drawers in the cupboard yonder."

"And how did you know of the place?"

"I was stationed here when I first joined the regiment. The chateau was untenanted. I rambled all over it. I explored its nooks and corners. I discovered that secret hiding place by chance and now the Eagle is there."

"And there it shall remain until it is discovered or until you give me leave to produce it," said the girl firmly.

"I have your promise?"

"You know well that I shall keep it."

"I thank you, mademoiselle. Twice you have saved my life and now, what is more to me than life, the emblem of my faith as a soldier, the honor of my regiment."

"But why keep it, this Eagle, at all," asked the girl, "and run this risk?"

"It may be needed again."

"But by whom?"

"The Emperor."

"The name is forbid."

"But the man is not."

"Ah, you think he will return?"

"I do."

"And when?"

"Mademoiselle has all my secrets. I am in her power absolutely. Why keep anything from her?"

"Why, indeed?" assented the woman, thrilling to the acknowledgment of her power over the man she loved as any woman would.

"When the violets bloom again," said the young man, bowing. "Now, mademoiselle, I am at your service," he resumed as she stared at him.

"At my service? What do you mean?"

"You have caught me here in your room. You have only to call out to summon assistance. I shall be removed from your pathway forever."

"But the Eagle?"

"I shall find means before I die to tell someone where to look for it if it should be needed."

"And I am to condemn you to death?"

"Why not?" said the young man. "I only lived to bring it back. I never dreamed that I was to have the happiness of seeing you again."

"Happiness? This anguish?" murmured the young woman in daring self-revelation.

She had forgot the hour, her dress, the strangeness of the situation, the awful impropriety of it all, the possibility of discovery. She only saw the man she loved. She saw how he loved her. She hung upon his words, and would fain hear more--more!

"My God!" he responded with a sort of fierce pride that was almost arrogant. "Although I was born a peasant, mademoiselle, not the finest gentleman in France or England could love you as I do. Yet it is impossible for you to love me now that the Emperor is no longer here. Your uncle would never consent. You, yourself, love that English gentleman. Why give thought to Marteau? Summon assistance, deliver me up and remember me as one who loved you with all the fervor of his heart, or forget me, if you can."

"I would not have you die," said the woman, shuddering. "God forbid."

"It is best so. Life holds nothing for me now."

"But if the violets bloom again?" asked the other.

"Ah!" exclaimed the man, throwing up his hands and drawing a long breath. "Then!"

"How came you here, monsieur?"

"By that window there. There is a ladder without. It reaches most of the way. I am a good climber. The ivy----"

"Go as you came. None shall be the wiser."

"To you always the disposition of my life, mademoiselle," said Marteau simply. "I obey your command. Farewell. It is but a postponement, anyway," he added as he turned away. "I can never escape from Grenoble. They will seize me sooner or later and----"

"Stay!" she cried.

Moved by an unaccountable impulse the girl took a step nearer to him. She loosened her clutch upon her garment and held out her hands to him.

"If it is to be farewell," she said tenderly, "know that I do not love that English Captain, no, and that. I----"

He seized her hand and covered it with kisses.

"I can die with better grace now," he said at last.

Not daring to trust himself further he turned to the window again. As he put his hand on the lock of the casement he heard shouts and cries outside, he saw torches. Escape that way was barred. The whole castle seemed suddenly to awake. He realized it all in a moment. He had been traced there. In another minute he would be discovered in the Countess's room at that hour of the morning. He turned swiftly to the dismayed girl.

"They are there," he said. "Escape is cut off."

Steps and voices resounded in the corridor.

"Quick," she said, "the closet yonder--you can hide."

She understood the peril as well as he.

"And bring disgrace upon you when they caught me? Never!"

"Marteau, for God's sake, I love you," said the woman agonizingly. "I cannot----"

She stretched out her hands to him again. Very lovely she looked, the peignoir falling from her white shoulders, the soft candle-light illuminating and yet concealing in its vague shadows the beauty of face and figure. Marteau did not dare to dwell upon that. He must act and instantly. He rushed toward the woman. He caught her by the hand. He even shook her a little.

"Shriek," he whispered in her ear.

He picked up the pistol from the bed upon which she had thrown it and pointing it upward pulled the trigger. Startled by his utterly unexpected action, the meaning of which she could not fathom, she did scream loudly. The next instant the door was thrown open and into the room half clad, sword in hand, burst the Marquis. With him were Sir Gervaise Yeovil and the young Captain, and attending them were servants and guards bearing lights.

The Marquis stared from his niece back to the young officer.

"My God!" he exclaimed. "Is it you?"

Marteau could only bow. He had a few seconds to make up his mind, a few seconds to decide upon the role he must play. Well, his life was certainly forfeit, his reputation he would also give for hers. Any explanation that he could make would be disbelieved unless, of course, he produced the Eagle, which was not to be thought of. Failing the Eagle the more he endeavored to account for his presence the more deeply would he involve the woman he loved.

"I find you here, you that I treated almost like a gentleman, who, I thought, nearly measured up to the title, in my niece's room at this hour of the morning," continued the enraged old man. "Laure, has he--has he harmed you?"

"You came too quickly, monsieur," answered Marteau, himself, giving the young woman time to recover herself.

"You heard the pistol shot." He threw the weapon from him. "We were struggling. It went off and----"

"You damned low-born coward," gritted out the English officer, stepping toward him furious with anger.

"Steady, Frank. There is something strange about this," said Sir Gervaise gloomily, catching his son by the arm. "He is no coward. That I'll warrant."

"But to seek entry into a woman's bed-chamber!" continued Frank furiously. "If you were a gentleman I'd----"

"That 'almost,'" said Marteau, "saves me in this instance."

"I feel this action almost as if it had been my own son, had God blessed me with one," said the old Marquis, slowly recovering his self-command. "A loyal Marteau, a thief, a despoiler of women! Why, she knelt to you in the hall. She raised her voice in your defense, and now you--you----" His fingers twitched. "The Count d'Aumenier," he added in bitter mockery. "You could not bear the title if it had been left in your hand. I shall have you branded as a thief in the morning and----"

"My uncle," said the woman, "he----"

"Mademoiselle," interposed Marteau sharply, resolved to protect her at all hazards, "is not my case black enough without further testimony from you? I beseech you to be silent."

"Speak, Laure," said the old Marquis. "If you have anything to say which will make his punishment surer and harder, I charge you to say it."

"Nothing, nothing," answered the poor young woman. "Oh, if ever a woman's soul was tortured----"

"You tortured her, did you?" cried the Englishman, struggling in his father's arms. "I once thought of meeting you in the field--you--you! I would like to strangle you with my bare hands."

"It is just. I honor monsieur for his rage. It is true, I love the woman, and----"

"Is this the way a gentleman shows his affection?" roared out the English captain.

"Monsieur forgets that I am almost, not quite, a gentleman."

"And there is another score we have to settle with you," cried the Marquis. "That cursed Eagle--where is it?"

"Before I sought mademoiselle," said Marteau, "I placed it in safety and in such keeping as will watch over it. You will never find it. It will only be produced when"--he stopped--"when the violets bloom again."

"What is this damned nonsense about flowers I hear everywhere?" burst out Sir Gervaise.

"Well, monsieur," said the Marquis, "it will be produced before that time, or when the violets do bloom they will find some red soil out of which to spring."

"You mean----"

"As I live I will have you court-martialed in the morning and shot for high treason. I stand for the King, for the ancient laws of France. I will have no paltering with traitors, and I am more inclined to deal swiftly and summarily with you since to treason you add theft and this attempt upon a woman. Produce that Eagle, or you die."

"I must die, then," said the young man.

"By heaven," said Sir Gervaise; looking keenly at the officer, "there is more in this than I can understand. Give me leave, my lord," he turned to Marteau. "I have liked you always. I would befriend you now. I do not believe in appearances always. Can you not explain?"

"Sir," said Marteau, "I am grateful to find one here who still believes----" He stopped. "The circumstances speak for themselves. I love mademoiselle. I was mad. I came here, I----"

"Gentlemen," said the Marquis, "let us withdraw. It is scandalous that we should be here under such circumstances. You, sir," he turned to Marteau, "this way."

The poor Countess had stood in agony and despair. Marteau did not look at her. He bent his head low as he passed her. Two soldiers of the guard grasped him by the arms, the rest closed about him.

"Go, gentlemen. I will see you presently," said the Marquis. "One of you servants yonder send the Countess's women here."

"I thank God," said young Yeovil, "that we got here in time. If he had harmed you, dearest Laure, I would have killed him here where he stood."

Her lover attempted to take her hand, but she shrank away from him. As Sir Gervaise passed her she bent forward and seized the old Baronet's hand and kissed it. He, at least, had seen that there was something beneath the surface.

"Now, my child," said the old Marquis kindly, but with fearful sternness, as the door closed behind the others, "what have you to add to what has been told?"

"What do you mean?"

"I know men. I know that that young man did not come here to assault you, or for robbery. You cannot tell me that the blood of the Marteaux runs in his veins for nothing. And I know you did not invite him here, either. You are a d'Aumenier. What is the explanation of it all?"

But the poor little Countess made no answer. She slowly collapsed on the floor at the feet of the iron old man, who, to save her honor and reputation, had played his part, even as Marteau, in her bedroom on that mad March morning.

CHAPTER XXIII

THE MARQUIS GRANTS AN INTERVIEW

The old Marquis was face to face with a terribly difficult problem. That the Eagle had been brought back did not admit of doubt. St. Laurent had seen it, and the officers who had been present at the midnight meeting in the Major's rooms made no attempt whatever to deny it. Marteau admitted it. But it had disappeared. He had not the faintest idea where it was. The most rigorous search had so far failed to discover it. Marteau had been questioned, appealed to, threatened, with no results whatsoever. His lips were sealed and no pressure that could be brought to bear sufficed to open them. He did not deny that he knew where the Eagle was. He simply remained silent, immutably silent, when he was asked where.

From the few loyalist officers in the regiments and in the town a court had been convened and Marteau had been put on trial. He had been found guilty--indeed, there was no other verdict possible, since he calmly admitted everything--of treason, disobedience of orders, a whole catalogue of crimes. The Marquis acted on the old feudal idea that he possessed all the rights of the ancient nobility, the high and low, the middle justice. And, indeed, he represented the King with full powers. The court, completely under his influence, had condemned the young soldier to death. Marteau might have appealed, he might have protested, but he did neither. He accepted the inevitable. What was the difference? No appeal would have been entertained, no protest would have availed. It all came to this, he would either have to give up the Eagle or his life.

Well, life was not worth very much to him, as he had said. Even though he realized from her desperate avowal of the night before that the interest of the Countess in him was more than she would have admitted, had not the words been surprised and wrung from her by his deadly peril, he knew that there was absolutely nothing to be hoped for in that direction. Even though his comrades, alarmed by the imminence of his danger, and aroused by the energetic determination of the old Marquis, besought him to give up the Eagle, he refused. He would have considered himself a forsworn man had he done so.

The Marquis had visited the prisoner and had condescended to make a personal appeal to him, imploring him by that old duty and friendship which had subsisted between the families, but his appeals had been as fruitless as his commands and his threats. The old noble was iron hard. He had no sympathy with the Empire or its Emperor, but the determination of the young officer did arouse a certain degree of admiration. He would fain have spared him if he could,

but, as he had sacrificed everything he possessed for the King, and counted the sacrifice as nothing, his sympathies did not abate his determination to punish treason and contumacy one whit.

The Marquis was accustomed to having things his own way, and the long period of exile had not changed his natural bent of mind in that particular. He was angry, too, at the stubbornness which he nevertheless admired. In other directions the Marquis was balked. He had seen through the little drama that had been played by Marteau and the Countess Laure in her bedchamber. That was one reason why he would fain have saved him, because he had so gallantly allowed himself to occupy the hideous role which he had assumed, to save the girl's honor. The Marquis had not the faintest suspicion that there was anything wrong in the situation, or even that his niece had actually given her heart to this man. Such a thought could not be entertained at all.

It was inconceivable, but he knew that, however innocent might have been that meeting, if it had been prearranged the world would consider the Countess disgraced, unless the explanation which Marteau had suggested was allowed to become current. He had summoned his niece before him, and had sought in every way to force her to tell him the whole truth, but she had partaken, in some degree, of Marteau's stubbornness. All she would say was, that Marteau was innocent of any crime or any wrong. But, when the bewildered Marquis asked her if she had invited him there, and if he was there by her permission, she had indignantly repudiated the suggestion as an insult, which left him more puzzled than before.

The idea that Marteau had come there to hide the Eagle had never entered the Marquis' mind for all his acuteness. He had asked the girl whether Marteau had brought anything into the room or taken anything from it, and she had answered truthfully that when she saw him he had been exactly as when they saw him. The testimony of the Marquis and the two Englishmen rendered it unnecessary for the Countess to be present at the court-martial. There was nothing material she could add, and, indeed, it was not for attempted theft, or assault, that Marteau had been condemned--the Marquis had suppressed that as much as possible--but for his conduct with the Eagle.

It was the fifth of March, a warm and sunny day in the south of France, even amid the mountains and hills of ancient Dauphine. Great things were toward, although the Marquis did not yet know it. The execution of the condemned was set for the next day. At ten o'clock in the morning the regiment was to be paraded and Marteau was to be shot. He had asked that he might be granted a soldier's death, and the Marquis had seen fit to grant the request.

There were very few troops in Grenoble which could be counted as loyal to the King, but there were some. From them the Marquis intended to draw his firing party, and with them he intended to over-awe the regiment if there should be any outbreak. He was too keen a judge of humanity, and too well able to read the characters of men not to realize the whole regiment was in a mutinous temper over the Eagle episode, that they looked upon Marteau as a martyr, and that there might be outbreaks and grave difficulties before he was shot. Well, difficulties did not daunt the stout-hearted, inflexible old noble. He rather enjoyed them. He rather welcomed this occasion, too, because he intended to be master now, and, having once mastered the regiment, he felt he would have no difficulty in controlling it in any future emergency.

To him, as he sat in his cabinet maturing his plans for the morrow, came a message from his niece, asking admittance. The privilege was, of course, instantly granted, and Laure d'Aumenier presently entered the room.

"Have you come, my child," began the old man, regarding her tenderly, for in the few years she had been with him he had learned to estimate the worth of her character and love her as she deserved, "to explain this mystery, to tell me why you declare that the presence of a man in the room of a woman of my house at three o'clock in the morning is innocent? I repeat," he went on reassuringly, "that I cannot conceive of or admit any wrong on your part, and that makes the situation more impossible of explanation."

"My uncle," answered the Countess, "I can only say that Monsieur Jean Marteau is not guilty, as he seems."

"And I can quite believe that," said the old Marquis. "Indeed, our English friend, who for all his bluntness is not without discrimination and good sense, has said as much to me. He declared with great emphasis that there was something in it all which he could not understand."

"And you--what did you say?"

"I asked him if that was meant for any reflection on the honor of my family, for if it were I should accord him the pleasure of crossing swords with me and in the end run him through."

"And he said----"

"He disclaimed absolutely the idea. He is as convinced of your sweetness, your innocence and purity, as I am."

"And Captain Yeovil?"

"He lacks his father's insight and finesse. He is young. He takes matters as he sees them, and fancies Marteau the common, vulgar thief he appeared."

"Impossible!" cried the Countess. "He is----"

"No doubt he is not especially prepossessed in favor of Monsieur Marteau, who has presumed to love you, and perhaps that accounts for his willingness to believe anything derogatory of him."

"He is blind, and I----"

"But you are not declining his hand on that account!"

"No, the marriage stands. I could wish that it did not," said the woman passionately. "I could be happier if he suspected me of anything, however base, and in his suspicion set me free."

"Hark ye, Laure," said the Marquis earnestly. "I am an old man, and the life I have led has not served to maintain my youth. What I am engaged in now does not conduce to that ease of body and peace of mind which promotes long life. To you I say what I have said to no one else. We are standing, as it were, on a volcano. The army is in no sense loyal to the King. I advised that it be disbanded absolutely, but I was overruled. It is seething with sedition. The envoys of the powers at Vienna are playing, idling, debating endlessly, and while they play and idle and talk in their fools' paradise, the Emperor, he who is so called by misguided France, will return. I should not be surprised at any moment to receive tidings that he has landed."

"And that is what they mean when they speak about the violets blooming again?"

"Yes, that is it. And, do you know as I walked in the garden this morning I found this."

He tossed the first tiny purple violet of the spring on the table before her.

"But he will be dead before the Emperor comes," murmured the woman, her hand upon her heart.

"Put that thought out of your mind, my child," said the old man. "Think rather of Captain Yeovil."

"I hate him," said the Countess, which was most unjust, for he had done nothing at all to deserve such an expression on her part.

"Hate is the passion of old age," said the Marquis slowly, "love that of youth. I told you that my race would soon be run. I am an old man. I have suffered much. I shall be content to die if I can serve my King here a little after all these years of weary waiting. The title-deeds that young man gave back do not cover much. The estate has been divided and granted to strangers. It is practically all gone but the old chateau. I have little or nothing to leave you beyond those small amounts which your father used to send me, which I never would touch because they came from a disloyal France. The Yeovils are true and worthy people. The boy is a gallant lad, a brave soldier, even if not overly acute. Sir Gervaise is a man of consideration and of great wealth. You are portionless. He is most generous. I am very happy in the thought that you will be taken care of. I know what it is to be alone and poor."

"I cannot bear----"

"We have to bear a great many things that we do not wish to in this life. You owe me some consideration. I still retain my faith and confidence in you. I have not pressed you to the wall with hard questions about last night."

"I know, I know, but----"

"And, as the head of the house, I must have even from the children the obedience which is my due."

"I do not wish to fail in my duty toward you, monsieur, but----"

"And your word, the word of a d'Aumenier, has been plighted. You entered into this engagement of your own free will. There was no constraint."

"But there was pressure."

"Yes, certainly, I know what is best for you, but you were not forced in any way, and your troth, having been plighted, your word given"--the old man stopped, looked at her solemnly, his long fingers tapping lightly on the table--"it must be kept," he said, with that air of absolute finality which none could assume better than he.

"It shall be, although it kills me."

"If I live I shall see that it is; and if I die I have your promise?"

"You have."

"That is well. You will live to thank me and bless me. I have fancied, of late, that your heart had been allowed to decline a little to this Marteau. Oh, he is a brave man and true, I know. I take no stock in his confession of theft or assault upon you. Why, I would have cut him down where he stood, or have him kill me if I believed that! But he is of another race, another blood. The Eagle does not stoop to the barnyard fowl. The heart of a woman is a strange thing. It leads her in strange ways if she follows its impulses. Thank God there are men who can and will direct and control those impulses. Put him out of your mind. It is best. To-morrow he will be a dead man. At any rate, I am rather glad of that," said the Marquis, half reflectively, knowing what trouble he might have made if he were to be allowed to live on. It was cold-blooded, but he could sacrifice Marteau for his niece's happiness, and find abundant justification in the annals of his house, where he could read of many Marteaux who had been sacrificed or had sacrificed themselves for the d'Aumeniers.

"I--I will promise," faltered the girl, "but on one condition."

"I like it not when youth makes conditions with age. Nevertheless, what is in your mind?"

"I want to see Marteau again."

"Impossible!"

"Wait," said the woman quickly. "Is it not true, have I not heard that he is condemned outwardly because he brought an Eagle here and it is gone?"

"Yes, that is true."

"And has it not been said that if he produced the Eagle his life could be spared and he could go?"

"That is also true."

"And would it not allay the dissatisfaction of the regiment and contribute to the establishment of your authority if he gave it up?"

"My authority is established by the King."

"The maintenance of it, then. Would it not enable you to control and hold in check these people, if you could show that you had not been balked?"

"That may be," said the Marquis. "Go on."

"And, if he should produce the Eagle----"

"I would save his life, but he would be a discredited man among his comrades, if I know anything about it."

"Oh, not that, surely."

"Surely; and I may tell you that if I were in his place I would do exactly as he has done."

The woman stepped nearer and put her hand to her head.

"Nevertheless, I must see him. Have mercy!" she entreated piteously.

"Why? Do you think you can persuade him to produce the Eagle--to his discredit, be it remembered?" asked the

old man, surveying her keenly, realizing at last the extraordinary interest she took in Marteau.

"But it is his life if he does not."

"Do you care so much for--his life?"

"Yes," answered the woman, looking the Marquis straight in the eyes.

He recognized a will as inflexible as his own. It aroused his admiration. He arose to his feet. He bowed before her.

"Mademoiselle," he said firmly, "you have the strength of our house. Perhaps it might be well if he could be induced to produce the Eagle and be thus discredited in the eyes of his comrades. It would tend to make my authority more secure. It would be to the advantage of the King."

"Yes, yes."

"But what argument can you bring?"

"I--I do not know."

"Alas, my child, you know more than you will tell. Oh, I recognize that it is useless to appeal, and impossible to constrain. Well, you give me your word of honor that whatever happens you will carry through the engagement with Captain Yeovil, and that we will together arrange a proper time and that you----"

"I give it."

"Your hand," said the Marquis. "Without there!" He raised his voice. An orderly appeared. "Send Monsieur St. Laurent to me."

"Monsieur," continued the old man, as the officer presented himself, "you will conduct the Countess Laure d'Aumenier to the small drawing-room; you will leave her there; you will then go to the guard-house and bring thence the prisoner, Marteau; you will conduct him to mademoiselle, my niece, and you will leave them together for half an hour; you will see that the prisoner is carefully guarded, that sentries are posted outside of the windows, and you, yourself, will remain with other escort, in front of the door."

"But out of hearing," said the young woman quickly.

"That, of course. And on your honor, on your duty, on your allegiance, you will say absolutely nothing about this to any one. Do you understand?"

"I understand, monsieur. I shall obey," said St. Laurent, a youth of rare quality, as has been seen.

"Good. You have one half-hour, my child. God grant that you may serve France and induce this wretched prisoner to give up the Eagle. Your impulse of mercy does you credit," he said adroitly, making the best of the situation for St. Laurent's benefit. "Now you may go."

"This way, mademoiselle," said St. Laurent, bowing low before her at the open door.

As the Countess passed down the long corridor she almost ran into young Pierre, the boy. He had been questioned with the rest, but had absolutely nothing to tell. Of course, he knew about the recovery of the Eagle, but that was all. He had known nothing about the midnight meeting. The Countess Laure had taken him into her service, her uncle being willing. And he had spent a miserable day when not with her, wondering and hoping and praying for Marteau. With others in the regiments he had received important news in the last hour, and had made every effort to get it to Marteau, as had been suggested to him, but he had hitherto failed. No sentry would pass him, and there was no way he could get speech with the prisoner.

He was in despair when he saw the Countess approaching, St. Laurent marching ceremoniously ahead, as if to clear the way.

"Mademoiselle," he whispered, plucking her gown.

"What is it?" asked the girl, naturally sinking her voice to the other's pitch.

"You will see--him?"

"Yes."

"A message."

"What is it?"

"Give him this."

The boy thrust into her hand two or three flowers like those her uncle had picked, the first purple blossoms of the virgin spring.

"And the message?"

"The violets have bloomed," said the boy, and he was gone.

CHAPTER XXIV

ON THE WHOLE DEATH MAY BE BETTER THAN LIFE

Marteau realized fully his position, and it would be idle to say that despite his depression he contemplated his fate without regret. Normally he would have wanted to live as much as any man, even though in his more passionate moments he had said that life without Laure d'Aumenier held nothing for him. To be sure, life without her did not look very inviting, and there was nothing in it for which he particularly cared, especially since the Emperor was gone, and Marteau had become a stranger, as it were, in France. If the Emperor had come back, or was coming back, it would be different.

In spite of rumors, originating nowhere apparently and spread by what means no one could say, that the Emperor was coming back, Marteau, in the depressed condition of his mind, gave these statements but little credence. Besides, even if they were true, even if Laure d'Aumenier loved him, even if he had everything on earth for which a man could ask or expect to live, he could not therewith purchase life; he could not even purchase love, at the expense of his honor.

He could not give up the Eagle for the kingdom. It was only a bit of gilded copper, battered and shattered, but it awakened in his nature the most powerful emotions which he was capable of entertaining. His love for Laure d'Aumenier was the great passion of his life. Yet even his love for the woman, or hers for him, if she had returned his devotion with equal intensity and ardor, would not avail to persuade him to give up that battered standard.

Even if she had loved him! Ah, what had she said in that moment of madness in her room that night? It was a moment of madness, of course, nothing else. Marteau put it out of his mind, or strove to. It could not be. Indeed, now that he was about to die, he would even admit that it should not be. But, if it were true, if that impulsive declaration indicated the true state of her regard--the possibility was thrilling, yet reflection convinced him it was better that he should die just the same, because there could be no mating between the two.

He had crossed swords with the Marquis. He had felt the hardness, the inflexibility and temper of the old man's steel. There would be no breaking him, no altering his will. He had made assurance doubly sure in some way, Marteau was convinced. This marriage with this young Englishman, whom the Frenchman regarded with a tolerant, half-amused contemptuousness for his simplicity and bluntness, would have to be carried through. When Marteau was dead the Countess would presumably return to a saner frame of mind, and forget the mad attachment, if indeed she had entertained it.

He took a certain melancholy satisfaction in the hope that he would at least become one of her sacred and cherished memories. But no memory can successfully dispute the claim of the living, as a rule. She would eventually marry this Englishman; he would make her a good husband, and by and by she would be happy, and Marteau would not be there to see. And for that he would be glad.

If the Emperor had been there, if the war god had come and summoned his men to arms again, Marteau might have eased the fever in his brain and soul by deeds of prowess on fields of battle, but in peace he should only eat his heart out thinking of her in the other man's arms. There were things worse than death, and this was one. On the whole, he concluded it was just as well, or even better, that he should die.

He was sufficiently versed in military and even civil law to see that his condemnation was irregular in the extreme, but he let it go. He was an obscure officer of a lost cause. There would not be any too rigorous an inquiry into what disposition the Marquis made of him. Nobody would care after it was all over. There remained nothing for him, therefore, but to die like a soldier, and--he smiled bitterly at the thought--almost a gentleman!

He had been informed that any reasonable request he made would be granted. He would fain see a priest of his Church, but later, and endeavor to make his peace with man after the time-honored custom of his religion, and thus insure his peace with God. Meanwhile, a request for a brief interview with the woman he loved had trembled on his lips, but it had found no utterance. He was quite aware how he stood in that quarter. He had come to the conclusion that the Marquis, at least, had seen through the little comedy--or, was it not a tragedy, after all?--which he had played in her bed-chamber, and he had convinced himself that the swiftness, the almost unseemly haste of his trial and condemnation and the nearness of his execution were largely due to a determination on the part of the old noble to get him out of the way before any scandal should arise. Perhaps scandal was certain to come, and gossip to prevail, but it would be less harmful if the man were dead.

To ask to see a woman whom he was supposed to have insulted so deeply and wronged so grievously would have served only to call attention to those things, to have given the whole game away, as it were. Besides, what would be the good of it? She would leave him weaker in his resolution than before. If she had loved him--ah, God, how his heart throbbed--if that impulsive admission had been the truth of her heart! Well, he told himself, he would have gone through the trial, accepted the verdict, received the bullets of the firing-squad in his heart, although it would have been harder. And yet--how he longed to see her.

He had not expected to see her ever again during his long tramp from Salzburg to Grenoble. He had not entertained the least idea that she would be there. He had schooled himself to do without her, contemplate life absolutely sundered from her. But when he did see her his whole being had flamed with the passion he had so long repressed in vain.

And the Countess Laure knew more of his heart than he fancied. During the morning she had had young Pierre before her. She had questioned him, suggesting and even prompting his artless revelations. The boy needed no suggestions. He was quick-witted and keen-eyed. Admiring Marteau extravagantly and devotedly as he did, he could not conceive how any one could fail to share his feelings. He told the hungry-hearted woman the story of their lives since they had been captured together at Arcis.

Reticent at first, Marteau had finally made a confidant of the lad, who had shown himself sympathetic, discreet, adoring. He had to tell somebody, he had to ease his heart of his burden. And when he had once begun naturally he poured it all out before the boy. He could not have told a man, a woman, perhaps, had one been by sufficiently sympathetic and tender, but, failing that, it was the boy who received the confidences and who never once presumed on these revelations. Indeed, he had a vein of romance in his peasant heart. He was a poet in his soul. Perhaps that was one reason why the man could confide in him. And then, when Marteau lay in the delirium of fever, the boy had shared their watches with the good Sisters of Charity. He alone had understood the burden of his ravings, for they were all about the woman. And, when she questioned him and gave him the opportunity, he poured forth in turn all the stored treasure of his memory.

And the poor, distraught, unhappy young woman hung on his words with heaving breast and panting heart and tear-dimmed eyes and cheeks that flushed and paled. Glad she was that he had so loved her; sad that it could make no difference. Indeed, young Pierre served his master well in that hour, and earned whatsoever reward, however great it might be, he should receive from him in the future.

How strangely selfish even in its loves is humanity! Although Marteau was intensely fond of the lad, and deeply devoted to him, absorbed in his overwhelming affection for the woman he had forgot the boy until too late to send for him that day. Well, he would remedy that omission on the morrow, he thought, as he abandoned himself once more to dreams of other days, to fruitless anticipations, to vain hopes of what might have been.

To him suddenly came St. Laurent. The young aide knew but vaguely of the scene in the Countess's bed-chamber and, therefore, there was no prejudice in his mind against the officer. Although he was a loyalist to the core, he could sympathize as a soldier with the other's point of view. His address toward him, therefore, was respectful, and even

indicated some of that sympathy.

"Monsieur," he began most courteously, "I am sent by the Governor to conduct you elsewhere."

"Shall I need my hat and cloak, monsieur?" asked the other, quite appreciative of the young man's treatment of him.

"You will," was the answer.

"Am I leaving this room permanently?"

"You will return to it in half an hour."

"And whither----"

"You will pardon me," was the firm reply, "I have orders to conduct you, not to answer questions."

"Your reproof," admitted Marteau, smiling faintly, "is well deserved. I attend you at once, sir."

Escorted by St. Laurent and two soldiers, he left the building, walked across the barrack yard, attracting instant attention from the soldiers off duty congregated there, and a few officers of the garrison who chanced to be passing. All of them saluted him with the utmost deference and the most profound respect. He punctiliously acknowledged their salutes with a melancholy grace and dignity. There was an air of great excitement everywhere, and he wondered vaguely what could be the cause of it.

To his further wonderment also he found his steps directed to the Governor's palace. Entering, he was ushered through the halls and marched to the door of a room which he remembered was one of the smaller waiting-rooms of the palace. St. Laurent stopped before the door, his hand upon the knob.

"Monsieur," he said, "to this room there is but this one door. I remain without with these soldiers. You can see by a glance through the windows that they also are closely guarded. Escape is impossible. In half an hour I will knock upon the door, open it, and escort you back to your place of confinement. Do you understand?"

"Perfectly."

"Enter."

Somewhat bewildered by the mysteriousness of the whole proceeding, and yet with a heart which in spite of himself did beat a little faster, Marteau entered the room, St. Laurent closing the heavy door behind him.

CHAPTER XXV

NOT EVEN LOVE CAN FIND A WAY

Standing in the middle of the room, her closed hand resting upon a table upon which she leaned as if for support, was Laure d'Aumenier. The old Marquis had not noticed it, nor did the young man; that is, the eye of neither took in the details, but both had been conscious of the general effect, for the young Countess had dressed herself in her most becoming gown, one that had been newly made for her in Paris before the journey to the south of France and that she had never worn before.

She had spent a miserable night and day. When she had talked with her uncle a short time before, the effects of her sleeplessness and anguish had been plainly apparent. But there, within that room, her color coming to her face, her eyes shining with excitement and emotion, she looked as fresh and as beautiful as the springtime without.

It was her right hand that rested on the table, and as Marteau approached her left instinctively sought her heart. In his emotion he looked at her with steady, concentrated glance, so keen, so piercing, as if he sought to penetrate to the very depths of her heart, that she could scarcely sustain his gaze. He, too, had forgot cares and anxieties, anticipation, hopes, dreams; in his excitement and surprise everything had gone from him but her presence. Here was the woman he

loved, looking at him in such a way, with such an air and such a bearing, her hand upon her heart--was that heart beating for him? Was she trying to still it, to control it, because----

His approach was slow, almost terribly deliberate, like the movement of the old Guard under Dorsenne--*Le Beau Dorsenne!*--against the heights of Pratzen on the glorious yet dreadful day of Austerlitz. His advance was irresistible, but unhurried, as if there must be a tremendous clash of arms in a moment to which haste could lend nothing, from the dignity and splendor of which hurry would detract. At another time the woman might have shrunk back faltering, she might have voiced a protest, or temporized, but now, in the presence of death itself, as it were, she stood steady waiting for him. Enjoying the luxury of looking upon him unrestrained, her heart going out to him as he drew nearer, nearer, nearer, she found herself tremblingly longing for his actual touch.

Now his arms went out to her, she felt them slowly fold around her, and then, like a whirlwind released, he crushed her against his breast, and, as she hung there, her throbbing heart making answer to the beating of his own, he kissed her again, again, again. Her heart almost stopped its beating. Beneath the fire of his lips her face burned. Her head drooped at last, her tense body gave way, she leaned upon him heavily, glad for the support of his strong arms.

"Laure," he whispered, "my little Laure, you love me. Oh, my God, you love me. It was true, then. I did not dream it. My ears did not mock me."

"Yes, yes," said the woman at last. "Whoever you are, whatever you are, wherever you go, I love you."

"And was it to tell me this that you came?"

"Yes. But not for this alone."

"What else?"

"I would have you live."

"For you?"

"For me."

"As your husband?"

"And if that were possible would you----"

"Yes, yes, would I what?"

"Give up the Eagle?"

"My God!" said the man, loosening his clasp of her a little and holding her a little away that he might look at her. "Does your love tempt me to dishonor?"

"I do not know," said the woman piteously. "I am confused. I cannot think aright. Oh, Marteau, Jean, with whom I played as a child, think of me. I cannot bear to see you dead outside there. I cannot look upon a soldier without thinking of it. The rattling of the carts in the streets sounds in my ear like shots. Don't, don't die. You must not."

"And, if I lived, would you love me?"

"So long as the good God gives me the breath of life."

"With the love of youth and the love of age?"

"Aye, for eternity."

"And would you be my wife?"

"Your wife?" said the woman, her face changing. "It would be joy beyond all, but I could not."

"Why not?"

"I--you know I am promised to another," she went on desperately, "and but that I might see you I repeated the

promise. Otherwise my uncle would never have permitted me this blessed privilege. I told him that I would marry anybody if he would only let me see you--alone--for a moment, even. What difference, so long as I could not be yours? I came to tell you that I loved you, and because of that to beg you to live, to give up that Eagle. What is it, a mere casting of metal, valueless. Don't look at me with that hard, set face. Let me kiss the line of your lips into softness again. I cannot be your wife, but at least you will live. I will know that somewhere you think of me."

"And would death make a difference? High in the highest heaven, should I be so fortunate as to achieve it, I would think of you; and, if I were to be sent to the lowest hell, I could forget it all in thinking of you."

"Yes, yes, I know how you love, because----"

"Because why?"

"I won't hesitate now. It may be unmaidenly, but I know, because I, too----"

"Laure!" cried the man, sweeping her to him again.

"I think I loved you when we were boy and girl together," said the woman, throwing everything to the winds in making her great confession. "I know I loved you that night in the chateau, although I would not admit it, and I treated you so cruelly. And when they told me you were dead, then, then, my heart broke. And when you came here and I saw you two men together--oh, I had made the contrast in my imagination--but last night I saw and now I see. Oh, you will live, live. What is honor compared to a woman's heart? See, I am at your feet. You will not break me. You will live. Something may happen. I am not married yet. The Emperor may come back."

"The boy, Pierre, said last night that it was rumored----"

"Yes, he gave me a message. I almost forgot it." She held out the violet crushed in her fevered palm. "He said to tell you that the violet has bloomed."

"Does he mean----?"

"I know not what he means."

"It is but an assurance begot of hope," said Marteau.

"And if it were so?"

"He comes too late. Rise, my lady. It is not meet for you to kneel. Let me lift you up, up to my heart. I cannot give up the Eagle. That I have won your love is the most wonderful thing in all the world. It passes my understanding, the understanding of man, but I should forfeit it if I should permit myself this shame."

"Then I will do it, I will betray you," said the little Countess desperately. "I alone know where that Eagle is. I will get it. I will bargain with my uncle for your life. Marteau, listen. Do you wish to condemn me to death? I will not, I cannot, survive you. I will not be thrust into that other's arms. I did not know, I did not realize what it was--before. But since I have been here, since you have held me to your heart, since you have kissed me--no, I cannot. It would be desecration--horror. Let me go. I will tell."

"Dearest Laure," said the man, holding her tighter, "think, be calm, listen. It needs not that I assure you of my love. I have proved it. I lie here with the stigma of shame, the basest of accusations in the hearts of those who know of our meeting at night, to save you from suspicion even."

"Not my uncle, not the Marquis. He says there is something back of it all. He knows you are not a thief."

"It takes a d'Aumenier to understand a Marteau," said the young man proudly.

"And I am a d'Aumenier, too," said the woman.

"Then strive to comprehend my point of view."

"I can, I will, but----"

"What binds you to that Englishman?"

"My word, my uncle's word."

"Exactly. And what else binds you to keep my secret?"

The woman stared at him.

"Oh, do not urge that against me," she pleaded. "I must tell all."

"I have your word. That Eagle must remain hidden there until the Emperor comes back. Then you must give it to him and say that I died that you might place it in his hand."

"There must be a way, and there shall be a way," said the agonized woman. "I love you. I cannot have you die. I cannot, I cannot."

Her voice rose almost to a scream in mad and passionate protest.

"Why," said the man soothingly, "I am the more ready to die now that I know that you love me. Few men have ever got so much out of life as that assurance gives me. That I, peasant-born, beneath you, should have won your heart, that I should have been permitted to hold you to my breast, to feel that heart beat against my own, to drink of the treasures of your lips, to kiss your eyes that shine upon me---- Oh, my God, what have I done to deserve it all? And it is better, far better, having had thus much and being stopped from anything further, that I should go to my grave in this sweet recollection. Could I live to think of you as his wife?"

"If you will only live I will die myself."

"And could I purchase life at that price? No. We have duties to perform--hard, harsh words in a woman's ear, common accustomed phrase to a soldier. I have to die for my honor and you have to marry for yours."

"Monsieur," broke in the sharp, somewhat high, thin voice of the old Marquis standing by the door, "the court-martial brands you as a traitor. Captain Yeovil and those who were with me last night think you are a thief and worse. But, by St. Louis," continued the old noble, fingering his cross, as was his wont in moments in which he was deeply moved, "I know that you are a soldier and a gentleman."

"A soldier, yes; but a gentleman?--only 'almost,' my lord."

"Not almost but altogether. There is not another man in France who could withstand such a plea from such a woman."

"You heard!" exclaimed Marteau.

"Only the last words. I heard her beg you to live because she loved you."

"And you did not hear----"

"I heard nothing else," said the Marquis firmly. "Would I listen? I spoke almost as soon as I came in. Laure, these Marteaux have lived long enough by the side of the d'Aumeniers to have become ennobled by the contact," he went on naively. "I now know the young man as I know myself. It is useless for you to plead longer. I come to take you away."

"Oh, not yet, not yet."

"Go," said the young officer. "Indeed, I cannot endure this longer, and I must summon my fortitude for tomorrow."

"As for that," said the Marquis, "there must be a postponement of the execution."

"I ask it not, monsieur. It is no favor to me for you to----"

"Thank God! Thank God!" cried the woman. "Every hour means----"

"And I am not postponing it because of you," continued the Marquis coolly. "But he who must not be named----"

"The Emperor."

"So you call him--has landed."

"Yes, yes; for God's sake, tell me more."

"I have no objection to telling you all. He is on the march toward Grenoble. He will be here tomorrow night. Troops have been sent for and will assemble here. He will be met in the gap on the road a few miles below the town. He will be taken. If he resists he will be shot."

"Yes, the violets have bloomed again."

"And they shall draw red nourishment from the soil of France," was the prophetic answer.

"The Emperor!" cried the young man in an exultant dream, "in France again! The Emperor!"

"And so your execution will be deferred until we come back. The Emperor may take warning from it when he witnesses it," continued the imperturbable old royalist.

"I shall see him once more."

"As a prisoner."

Marteau started to speak, checked himself.

"For the last time," said the girl, "I beg----"

"It is useless."

"Let me speak again. My uncle has a kind heart under that hard exterior. He----"

"A kind heart, indeed," said the old man, smiling grimly, as Marteau shook his head at the girl he loved so well. "And, to prove it, here."

He extended a sealed paper. Marteau made no effort to take it. He recognized it at once. For a moment there flashed into the woman's mind that it was a pardon. But the old man undeceived her.

"Do you give it to him, Laure," he said. "It is that patent of nobility that he gave up. Acting for my King, who will, I am sure, approve of what I have done, I return it to him. As he dies with the spirit and soul of a gentleman, so also shall he die with the title. *Monsieur le Comte d'Aumenier*, I, the head of the house, welcome you into it. I salute you. Farewell. And now," the old man drew out his snuff box, tendered it to the young man with all the grace of the ancient regime. "No?" he said, as Marteau stared in bewilderment. "The young generation has forgot how, it seems. Very well." He took a pinch himself gracefully, closed the box, tapped it gently with his long fingers, as was his wont. "Monsieur will forgive my back," he said, turning abruptly and calling over his shoulder, "and in a moment we must go."

Ah, he could be, he was a gentleman of the ancient school, indeed. It seemed but a second to youth, although it was a long time to age, before he tore them apart and led the half-fainting girl away.

CHAPTER XXVI

THEY MEET A LION IN THE WAY

Morning in the springtime, the sixth of March, 1815, bright and sunny, the air fresh. The parade-ground was filled with troops. There were the veterans of the old Seventh-of-the-Line, under the young Colonel Labedoyere. Here were the close-ranked lines of the Fifth regiment, Major Lestoye astride his big horse at the head of the first battalion. Grenier, Drehon, Suraif and the other officers with their companies, the men in heavy marching order, their white cockades shining in the bright sunlight in their shakos. The artillery was drawn up on the walls, the little squadron of household cavalry was in attendance upon the Marquis. His lean, spare figure looked well upon a horse. He rode with all the grace and ease of a boy.

Yes, there were the colors, too, the white flag of France with the golden lily in the place of the Eagle on the staff, at the head of the column. With ruffling of drums and presenting of arms the flag had been escorted to its place, and from the little group of cavalry had come the words not heard till recently for so many years in France:

"*Vive le Roi!*"

The troops had assembled silently, somewhat sullenly. They stood undemonstrative now. What they would do no one could tell. The couriers who had dashed into the town yesterday night had told the story to the Marquis. Napoleon had landed five days before. He was within a day's march of Grenoble. His following consisted of eleven hundred French infantry, eighty Polish horsemen, and a few guns; troops of the line, and the grenadiers of the Elba guard. The peasants had been apathetic. He had carefully avoided garrisoned towns, choosing the unfrequented and difficult route over the maritime Alps of Southern France. He was marching straight into the heart of the country, to conquer or to die with this little band. The messenger's news had been for the Governor's ears alone, but it had got out. Indeed, the tidings spread everywhere. Every wind that swept over the mountains seemed to be laden with the story. The whole city knew that the foot of the idol was once more upon the soil of France. They saw no feet of clay to that idol, then.

The news had reached Paris via Marseilles almost before it was known in Grenoble. The terror-stricken government yet acted promptly. Troops were put in motion, fast-riding expresses and couriers warned garrisons and transmitted orders to capture or kill without mercy. By a singular freak of fate most of these orders were perforce given to the old companions in arms of the Emperor. Most of these were openly disaffected toward the King, and eager to welcome Napoleon. A few were indifferent or inimical to the prospective appeal of their former Captain. Still fewer swore to capture him, and one "to bring him back in an iron cage!" Only here and there a royalist pure and simple held high command, as the Marquis at Grenoble.

The old noble acted with great promptitude and decision. As the Governor of Dauphine he had an extensive command. Grenoble was the most important town in the southeast. Within its walls was a great arsenal. It was strongly fortified, and adequately garrisoned. No better place to resist the Emperor, if his initial force had grown sufficiently to make it formidable, could be found. Rumor magnified that force immensely. The Marquis gave the order for the concentration of all the troops in the province, to the number of six thousand. He sent out scouting detachments, and companies of engineers to break down bridges and block up roads--none of whom, by the way, obeyed his orders. In short, he did everything that experience, skill and devotion could suggest to stop the Emperor and terminate the great adventure then and there.

The ruffling of the drums in the square ceased. The old Marquis detached himself from his staff and the cavalry and rode out between the regiments. He lifted his hand. There was an intensity of silence on every hand. Even the people of the town had left their places of business and were crowded close to the lines to hear and see what was to be done.

"Bonaparte," said the Marquis, that high, thin, somewhat cracked old voice carrying with astonishing clearness in every direction, "landed from Elba in the Gulf of Juan a few days ago. This usurper, this bloody-minded tyrant, has broken every oath, disregarded every treaty. He is coming to Grenoble. He will be here to-day. As loyal subjects of our gracious and most catholic Majesty, King Louis XVIII, whom God preserve," continued the old man, taking off his hat, "it becomes our duty to seize, and if he resists, to kill this treacherous monster, who had plunged Europe into a sea of blood and well-nigh ruined France." The old man did not mince words, it appeared! "You, gentlemen and comrades, have all sworn oaths before God and man to be faithful to the King whose bread you eat and whose uniform you wear. It has been said to me that there is disaffection among you. I cannot believe that a soldier of France can be false to his oaths and to his flag. The Fifth Regiment of the Line will march with me to meet the Corsican. The cavalry and my personal escort will keep the gates. If by any chance we should be beaten, which I cannot think possible with such brave men and gallant officers, the town must be held. Colonel Labedoyere, to you I commit the charge. Have your men line the walls. Dispose the troops which will soon be arriving advantageously. See that the guns are double-shotted. If by any chance I do not return, hold the place to the last. Troops are marching to your aid from all over France. Major Lestoype, move your regiment. *Vive le Roi!*" ended the old man.

Again the cry was echoed, but not by many; the household cavalry, one or two of the newer companies of the brigade, some of the citizens. The Marquis noticed it; everybody noticed it. Well, what difference did it make to the old man? They might cry or they might not cry. Fight they must, and fight they should. He had something of the old Roman spirit in him, the Marquis d'Aumenier. Upon him had devolved the conduct of the critical issue. If he could stop Napoleon then and there his venture would be a mere escapade and a sorry one. If he could not, then God help France and the world.

From the window of his prison, which overlooked the parade, Marteau had seen and heard all. The Emperor was coming and he would not be there to extend him a welcome. He forgot that if Napoleon had been a day later it would have made no difference to Marteau if he never came. He would have given years of his life, if it had been possible, to have marched with the column.

Orders had been published that morning postponing his execution until the return of the regiment. Just what was in the Marquis' mind no one could absolutely say, but he was shrewd enough to recognize the possibility of an outbreak or an attempted mutiny among the troops, when the sentence of execution was being carried out. He did not want any difficulties of that kind then. Not because he feared them or felt unequal to them! Oh, no. But because such an outbreak would make the regiment more difficult to control in the greater emergency, and he knew he needed all the influence and moral power and force he could exercise to keep it in line for the graver duty and more tremendous responsibility it must now face. And because he did not wish to leave it with Marteau in Grenoble, he took the regiment with him. If he could force it to do its duty and arrest Napoleon, he could deal with Marteau at his leisure. The Emperor was the greater issue, and Marteau benefited by that fact.

So, with drums beating and flags flying, the Fifth-of-the-Line marched down the road. With the Colonel and his staff rode Sir Gervaise Yeovil and his son. They had asked permission and it had been accorded them. Indeed, the staff was scanty. Young St. Laurent and an orderly, besides the two Englishmen, alone accompanied the old man. Realizing how critical the situation was, and how important it was that the town should be held, he had left every officer and man upon whom he could count with the cavalry, and with instructions to watch Labedoyere particularly, and check any disloyalty, if possible. If the Marquis alone could not effect his purpose with the regiment, no staff officer could aid him. He was a lonely old man and a hard that morning. The odds against him were tremendous, and his weapons were flawed and breaking in his hand. That only made him the more firmly resolute. He knew how sometimes one man could enforce his will on unwilling thousands. Was he that man that day? He would see.

Some miles south of the town the winding road ran along the side of a high and rocky hill. On the side opposite to the hill was a deep morass. This place was known as the Gap. The Marquis, who had apparently thought of everything, had reconnoitered the country, and had decided upon the defensibility of a place like this in the case of such an emergency as he was about to face, for along that hillside ran the main highway to the coast of France.

The troops reached it about noon-time. The road was high up on the hillside. The Marquis, riding in advance of his regiment, saw far down the long road and across a little river a moving column of men. Above them floated the tricolor flag, the blue and the red vividly distinct in the bright sun, which seemed to be reflected, as it were, from a crown of glory at the top of the staff. There were perhaps twelve hundred soldiers on foot and a few score on horseback. They were coming steadily along the road. The distance was almost too great to distinguish men, but one rode a white horse at the head. The soldiers could see with their minds and hearts better than their eyes, and they recognized that gray-coated figure on that familiar white horse. They could hear the beating of drums faintly. The bridges had not been broken. The fords were not guarded. The advance parties had failed. Presage of disaster!

The Marquis congratulated himself that he was in time to repair the disobedience of orders, which he promised himself to punish at the first opportunity. Instantly he directed Major Lestoype to deploy the men from column into line, so that they filled the road, which was here very broad and spacious. On a sloping hillside he placed flanking companies. The command was given to load, and the ramrods soon rang in the gun-barrels. Major Lestoype's voice shook as he gave the commands, which were repeated hoarsely, brokenly, nervously, by the company and the platoon officers. The dispositions of the men were soon concluded. The place of the Marquis was behind the line, but he rode to the right of it in a little depression cut out by the rains of winter in the side of the hill, underneath a great tree which was just beginning to show its leaves in the soft spring air and sunshine. From there he could command every part of the line with his glance, or move to the front or rear as the occasion might warrant. There he could see and be seen.

He was always pale, his old face seamed and drawn, but to his friends, the Englishmen, he seemed paler and older than ever, as he sat quietly calming his nervous horse. And Sir Gervaise Yeovil was pale, too. Not that he had any bodily fear, but the incident was so fraught with consequences which a man as experienced as he could so easily foresee, appreciate and dread, that its possibilities oppressed his heart. Young Frank Yeovil was all excitement, however. Napoleon had been buried in Elba, but none mentioned his name in any country in Europe without a thrill. Few do it now without a thrill, for that matter. The young man, modestly in the background, as was proper, leaned forward in his saddle and stared at the approaching men and the figure to the fore. So this was the great Bonaparte? He longed earnestly for a nearer view.

"Think you, my lord," whispered the Baronet to the old Marquis, his great anxiety showing in his voice, "that your men are to be depended upon? That they will----"

The Marquis shook his head, stared down the ranks at the men standing grim and tensely silent at parade-rest.

"They look steady," he replied, shrugging his shoulders. "They have taken an oath to the King, and--God only knows."

"What shall you do?"

"The best I can with the means at hand," was the indomitable answer.

"And if---"

"There are no 'ifs,' monsieur," was the imperious way in which the Marquis silenced the other.

Recognizing that he had said enough, and indeed pitying the old man so alone, the Baronet drew back a little.

"By heaven," whispered young Frank Yeovil to his father, "I wouldn't be elsewhere for a thousand pounds."

"It may cost you that before you get away, and more," said the old man grimly. "It will cost England millions, unless----"

"*Monsieur le Commandant*," said old Major Lestoype, riding up to the group and saluting respectfully.

"Major Lestoype."

"The command is formed and ready, sir."

"Véry good. Take your place and be prepared."

"Will *Monsieur le Marquis* permit me?" asked the old soldier, who had acquired a genuine respect for the old noble.

"Permit you what?"

"To return his advice," was the not unexpected reply.

"The thought of me, which is evidently back of your words, sir, inclines me to overlook their meaning and its impropriety. Know, sir, that I am always ready," was the grim comment of the ancient soldier.

"Indeed, sir--" began the other, but the Marquis cut him short with an imperious gesture and a word.

"Retire."

The Major saluted, resumed his place in the line. No one spoke. The approaching soldiers were nearer now. They were coming. The Fifth-of-the-Line sensed rather than heard a command down the road. They saw the guns of that little army come from their shoulders to a slanting position across the breast--arms apart! It was the habit of the Guard to go into action at arms apart. What had Dorsenne, *Le Beau Dorsenne*, said on that famous day? "The Guard fights at the point of the bayonet!" Would the guns come down to a charge? Would they have to meet bayonet thrusts from these terrible soldiers?

There was something ominous in the slow movements of the men, picked men they were, the grenadiers of the Elba Guard especially being of great size, their huge bearskins towering above them. They were marching in columns of fours, but the road was wide; another sharp command and the men with slow yet beautiful precision deployed into a close column of companies at half distance--the very formation for a charge in mass! The brass drums were rolling a famous march, "La Grenadiere," the grenadier's march. The hearts of the Fifth-of-the-Line were keeping time to the beating of those drums.

Ah, they were splendid soldiers, that regiment of infantry. Even the youths got something from the veterans. They stood still, quiet, at parade-rest, staring. The distance was growing shorter, shorter and shorter. Some of the officers looked toward the Marquis. Even his nervous horse seemed to have caught the spirit of the moment, for he was at last still. The old man sat there immobile, his lips pressed, his eyes fixed on the approaching troops and shining like sword-blades in the sunlight--horse and man carved, as it were, out of the rock of the mountains. Presently that high, thin, sharp voice rang out. Men heard it above the rolling of the drums.

"Attention!" he cried. The men straightened up, swung the heavy muskets to their sides. "Carry arms." As one man the battalion lifted its weapons. "Make ready!" With a little crash the guns were dropped into the outstretched hands.

The approaching men were nearer now. Still they came on with arms apart. Still the drums ruffled and rolled at their head. They were not going to make any response apparently to the fire of the Fifth-of-the-Line. Were they, indeed, to come to death's grapple at the bayonet's point with that irresistible Guard? But no, there was a sudden movement, a change in the approaching ranks.

"Secure arms," cried old Cambronne, and with their guns reversed and comfortably tucked under their arms, the old soldiers came on.

The meaning was plain, the battle was to be a moral one, evidently!

"Aim!" cried the sharp voice of the Marquis, and the guns came up to the shoulders of the long line, as they bent their heads and mechanically squinted along the barrels.

The moment had come! Out in the front had ridden the familiar figure on the white horse. They could see the details of his person now. His pale face was flushed under the familiar black, three-cornered cocked hat with its tricolor cockade, his gray redingote was buttoned across his breast. He suddenly raised his hand. The drums stopped beating, the moving grenadiers halted. Ah, at last!

The Emperor sprang from his horse, not heavily, as of late, but with some of the alertness of a boy. He nodded to the ranks. Old General Cambronne, in command of the Guard, stepped forward. He took from the colour-bearer the Eagle. Four grenadiers of the Colour Guard closed about him—one of them was called Bullet-Stopper, by the way. In rear and a little to the right of the Emperor he moved, holding up the flag and the Eagle. A deep breath, almost a sob, ran down the line of the regiment. Protended guns wavered. Napoleon stepped forward. He threw back his gray overcoat, disclosing the familiar green uniform of the Chasseurs of the Guard, which he affected. The cross of the Legion of Honor glittered on his breast, a shining mark at which to aim.

The flush on his ivory face died as quickly as it had come. He was apparently as composed and as steady as if he had been cut out of granite. But tiny beads of sweat bedewed his brow, shaded by that familiar cocked hat. What would the next moment disclose? Would he be a prisoner, the laughing stock, the jest of Europe? Or would he lie dead in the road, a French bullet in his heart? He had faced the guns of every people in Europe, but he had never faced French guns before. Would any finger in that line press a trigger? Only God knew, but the Emperor would soon find out. Better death than exile without wife, child, friend, or France. On the hazard of the moment he staked all. Yet he who could have looked into that broad breast could have seen that heart beating as never before. Firmly he stepped on.

CHAPTER XXVII

COMRADE! GENERAL! EMPEROR!

"Behold the traitor," shouted the Marquis, his emotion lending depth to that thin voice. "Fire, soldiers!"

No finger pressed a trigger. The silence was ghastly.

Ah! a thrill of hope in the breast of the greater Captain, of despair in the heart of the lesser.

"By God!" muttered Yeovil, "he has lost them!"

The Marquis spurred his horse forward.

"Your oath! For France! The King! Fire!" he shouted.

And now a greater voice broke the silence.

"Comrades! Do you not know me?" said the Emperor. Was there a tremble in his clear, magnificent voice? He paused, his speech stopped. "Behold your General," he resumed. He waited a few seconds again and then finally,

desperately, "Let any one among you who wishes to kill his Emperor fire--now."

He raised his voice tremendously with that last word. It almost came with the force and clearness of a battle-cry. The Marquis sat stupefied, his face ghastly pale.

"There is yet time," he cried hoarsely at last. "Is there none here faithful to his King? Fire!"

But the gun-barrels were coming down. "*Comrade! General! Emperor!*" who could be indifferent to that appeal? Disregarding the old Marquis absolutely, as if he were not on the earth, the Emperor came nearer smiling. He was irresistible to these soldiers when he smiled.

"Well," he said, his hands outstretched and open, "soldiers of the Fifth, who were with me in Italy, how are you all? I am come back to see you again, *mes enfants*," he went on genially. "Is there any one of you who wishes to kill me?"

"No, no, Sire. Certainly not," came the cry.

"Escape," whispered the Marquis to the Englishman, "while there is yet time to take my niece away. To you I commit her... St. Laurent, to the town with the tidings!"

"By God, no," growled Yeovil, as St. Laurent saluted and galloped rapidly down the road. "I am going to see the end of this. The damned cravens!" he muttered, looking at the soldiers.

"And yet," continued Napoleon to the troops, "you presented your guns at me."

"Sire," cried one of the veterans, dropping his musket and running his ramrod down the barrel, "it is not loaded. We only went through the motions."

The Emperor laughed. He was nearer.

"Lestoype," he said, "is it thou, old comrade, and Grenier and Drehon!"

It was astonishing that he should remember them, but so he did. He went down the line, speaking to the men, inspecting them just as of old. The officers could not keep them in line. They crowded about their old leader. Shouts of "*Vive l'Empereur!*" rent the air. Men took off their caps, tore out the hated white cockades, trampled them under foot, and from pockets where they had concealed them for this very moment, they replaced them with the tricolor.

In his movements the Emperor at last confronted the Marquis.

"And who is this?" asked Napoleon, staring up at him curiously.

The Marquis' heart was broken. It was not in the human power of any servant of the King to dominate that scene. A greater personality than his was there. The Emperor had shown himself as of yore, and exhibited his mastery. But no greater ideal possessed any man than that in the heart of the old noble. He hated, he loathed, he abominated the man who looked up at him. He saw in the action of the soldiery a picture of the action of France, the downfall of the King. Well, it flashed into his mind that he at least, and perhaps he alone, might put a stop to it. From his holster he whipped out a pistol and leveled it at the Emperor. Lestoype, riding near, struck up his hand, the bullet sped harmlessly, the Emperor stood unharmed. A roar of rage burst from the soldiers who came running. Dropping the weapon and reining his startled horse violently back, so as to give himself a certain present and temporary freedom of action, the Marquis drew his other pistol. Lestoype spurred his horse in front of the Emperor, but Napoleon was not menaced.

"Have no fear," said the Marquis almost gently. "I have failed my King. The bullet goes into a truer heart--my own," he added proudly.

Before any one could stop him there was a flash, a muffled report, the spare figure reeled and fell forward on the saddle. He, at least, after the manner of his house, would not survive a failure which, although he could not prevent it, must inevitably be charged against him.

"A brave man," said the Emperor coolly, staring at him with his hard, bright, gray eyes. "See that his body is cared for in accordance with his rank and his courage. But who are these?" he asked, remounting his horse and facing the two Englishmen, who had dismounted and received the body of the Marquis, stone dead instantly. "As I live, it is the man of law," he said, his marvelous memory serving him well again, "who was at the Chateau d'Aumenier. It only needs

Marteau----"

"He is alive, your Majesty," interposed Lestoye eagerly. "He brought back our Eagle and is----"

"Where is it, and why is he not with you?"

"The Eagle is in hiding somewhere in Grenoble, Marteau in prison. He hid it, and because he would not tell where, the Marquis yonder condemned him to death."

"He has not yet been shot?"

"Not yet, Sire. He waits the return of the regiment."

"Good," said the Emperor. "We will surprise him. Face the men about. We shall go on to Grenoble and see what welcome awaits us there."

He was in high spirits. In this first clash with the troops of King Louis he found that he exercised the old influence over them and from the army, at least, he now realized that he had nothing to fear.

One of the men who had stood nearest the Emperor back of Cambronne was an old grenadier. He had recognized the Marquis d'Aumenier, he had heard the Emperor's conversation and the name of Marteau, and a thrill went through the heart of old Bal-Arret when he learned that his beloved officer and friend was yet alive.

The body of the old Marquis--covered with his cloak, and over his heart the now discarded royal standard, for which nobody cared since he was dead--was placed on a farm wagon and escorted back to Grenoble by some of the officers of the regiment and two companies, with reversed arms. He was watched over by the two Englishmen, whom Napoleon freely permitted to follow their own pleasure in their movements, being desirous of not adding fuel to any possible fire of animosity and of showing every respect to every Frenchman, whatever his predilection.

With the Fifth-of-the-Line in the lead, the army moved forward after a halt for noonday meal. The greatly relieved, happy and confident Emperor, riding now with the old regiment of Italy in the van, and now with the grenadiers in the rear, approached Grenoble late in the afternoon. The short March day was drawing to a close when they came in sight of the heavily garrisoned walls of the town.

Labeledoyere had obeyed orders in some particulars. The ramparts had been manned, the cannon were loaded, torches were blazing on the walls, and the town was awake and seething with excitement. He had declared for the Emperor, and after a sharp little conflict had disarmed the royalist cavalry and himself held the gates. Every regiment that had come in had cast its lot in with Napoleon. As the soldiers in the town heard, in the twilight, the beating of the drums--"*La Grenadiere*" the old march again!--the Colonel of the Seventh, having seized the few royalists, opened the gates, marched out at the head of the troops to receive the Emperor with arms, yes, but with open arms. Amid the shouts of the citizens and the delirious joy of the soldiery, the Emperor entered the city; in his train, first fruits of the war, was the body of the old servant of the unfortunate King.

It was Pierre who burst into the apartment of the little Countess with the news.

"The Emperor is here, mademoiselle," he cried enthusiastically. "The soldiers are bringing him to the palace."

"And Marteau?"

"He will be free."

"Thank God!" cried the girl, and then she remembered her uncle. "And the Marquis?" she asked.

"My dearest Laure," said the kindly, sympathetic voice of Captain Frank Yeovil, stepping out of the twilight of the hall into the bright light of the little drawing-room where last night she had bade farewell to Marteau, "prepare yourself for some dreadful----"

"Yes, yes, I know," she interrupted. "The Emperor is here."

"The troops went over to him."

"And my uncle?"

"He----"

"Speak, monsieur. What has happened? Did the Emperor----"

"No one harmed him. He could not survive the disgrace, mademoiselle. Prepare yourself."

"Oh, for God's sake, delay not your tidings."

"He died like a soldier of France on the field, by his own hand rather than survive what he wrongfully thought his shame."

It was the policy of the Emperor to be merciful; it was his wish to be clement. If possible, he wanted peace. If mercy and gentleness could get it he could have it. He gave free permission to Sir Gervaise Yeovil and his son to return to England. He made no objection to their taking with them the Countess Laure, now the last of the line. He, himself, was present at the funeral of the Marquis, who was buried with all the military honors of his rank and station. There were generous hearts among those Frenchmen. As the representative of the King they had hated him, but when he had died so gallantly rather than survive what his nice sensibility believed to be his dishonor, his failure at any rate, they honored him. If he had been a Marshal of France they could have done no more.

Marteau, restored to his rank and position as aide to the Emperor, had but a few moments with the grief-stricken woman.

"No," she said sadly, "it makes no difference. You know my heart. No words that I can utter could add anything more to the testimony I have given you. But I had promised my uncle, and now that he is dead, the promise is doubly sacred. I must go. Thank your Emperor for me for all he has done for me, his enemy, and for my friends, and for what he has done for you. Tell him the story of the Eagle, and the little part in it that I played and--you will not forget me as I will not forget you."

"God grant," said the young soldier, "that I may die for France on some battlefield, my last thought of you."

"Ah, if that should befall you, I should envy you your rest. Would to God I might look forward to such a quick and happy ending," said the grief-stricken woman, turning away.

The next morning, with great ceremony and much rejoicing, the Eagle was brought out, and the Emperor once more presented it to the regiment. He did more than that. He signalized the action of the Fifth-of-the-Line, the news of which had been sent broadcast by couriers and which struck a keynote for the army to follow, by incorporating it as a supplementary Fifth regiment of Grenadiers of the Guard. He promised them a new flag and new bearskins. He promoted Lestoype to be a lieutenant-colonel, Labedoyere to be a general, and promised every veteran officer his old rank or higher in the new army to be formed. The men were promised bounties and rewards, and, with high hopes and glorious anticipations, the march for Paris was begun.

So by the wayside and in the fields around this little army in that springtime, the violets bloomed again.

BOOK III

THE LAST TRY

CHAPTER XXVIII

AT THE STAMP OF THE EMPEROR'S FOOT

The wonderful genius of Napoleon, which had been so clearly manifested in so many ways during his varied career, was never exhibited to better advantage than in the three months after his return from Elba. During that period he reorganized the government, recreated and reequipped an army. The veterans flocked to his standards, and within the time mentioned he had actually two hundred and fifty thousand men under arms.

With the better moiety of this force, the best armed, the best equipped, the best officered contingent, he took the field early in the month of June. The Emperor did not want war any more than France did. He began his new reign with the most pacific of proclamations, which probably reflected absolutely the whole desire of his heart. But the patience of Europe had been exhausted and the belief of rulers and peoples in the honesty of his professions, declarations or intentions, had been hopelessly shattered.

His arrival effected an immediate resurrection of the almost moribund Congress of Vienna. The squabbling, arguing, trifling plenipotentiaries of the powers had burst into gigantic laughter—literally, actual merriment, albeit of a somewhat grim character!—when they received the news of Napoleon's return. They were not laughing at Napoleon but at themselves. They had been dividing the lion's skin in high-flown phrases, which meant nothing, endeavoring to incorporate the Decalogue and the Sermon on the Mount in their protocols and treaties, when they suddenly discovered that the Emperor was still to be reckoned with.

Differences were instantly laid aside and forgotten. Russia, Prussia and Austria immediately agreed to put in the field two hundred and fifty thousand men each. The smaller powers, Sweden, Spain, the Low Countries, promised contingents. England once more assumed the familiar role of paymaster by immediately placing a vast subsidy at the disposal of the allies. She gave them also what was of more value than a subsidy, a soldier of the first rank to command the armies in the field.

The Duke of Wellington had never crossed swords with the greatest captain of his day and perhaps of all time. But he had measured himself with the ablest and most famous of Napoleon's Marshals. With greatly inferior forces, through four years of desperate fighting, he had defeated the Marshals and armies of France. The dashing and gallant Junot had been routed at Vimiero, Victor had been overwhelmed at Talavera. Wily old Massena with all his ability could look back to the disaster of the blood-stained hill of Busaco, Marmont, the dainty tactician, had been smashed at Salamanca, stubborn Jourdan had been at last decisively defeated at Victoria. Finally, the brilliant Soult had been hurled out of the Pyrenees and had met his master at Toulouse. Still, great as were these soldiers and highly trained as they had been in the best of schools, not one of them was a Napoleon; all of them together were not, for that matter. Would the luster of Wellington's fame, which extended from the Ganges to the Ebro, be tarnished when he met the Emperor? It was a foregone conclusion, of course, that Schwarzenberg would command the Austrians; Blucher, the "Hussar General," the hard-fighting, downright old "Marshal Vorwärts," the Prussians; and the Emperor Alexander, with his veteran captains, the vast horde of Russians.

To assemble, arm, equip and move two hundred and fifty thousand men was a great task in those days even for a rich and populous country flushed with victory and in the enjoyment of an abundance of time and unlimited means. The organizing, it almost might be said the creative, ability of Napoleon was not shared by his opponents. Try as they would, June found their preparations still woefully incomplete. The Austrians had scarcely moved at all. The slower Russians, who were farther away and were to constitute the reserve army, could be discounted from any present calculation of the enemies of the Empire. The English and their smaller allies from the Low Countries, and the Prussians, whose hatred of France and the Emperor was greater than that of any other nation, were quicker to move. Two hundred and fifteen thousand men, half of them Prussians, a third of the other moiety English, the remaining two-thirds Belgians, Hollanders, and other miscellaneous nationalities, had joined the colors on the northwestern frontier of France. One-half of this joint assembly was commanded by Blucher and the other half by Wellington.

Leaving the weaker half of his own great army to complete its equipment, and placing strong detachments in

fortress and at strategic points to oppose the Austrians should they advance, the Emperor, as has been said, with about one hundred and twenty-five thousand men took the field. Naturally, inevitably, Belgium, the immemorial battleground of the nations, and the great English-Prussian army were his objectives. He saw clearly the dangers that encompassed him, the demands he must meet and the conditions over which he must triumph.

It was by no means certain, even if he decisively defeated his enemies in Belgium and occupied Brussels, that his trouble would be over. There would still be left a possible five hundred thousand trained and disciplined men with whom he would have to deal, under rulers and generals the inveteracy of whose hatreds he could well understand. But at least his position would be greatly improved by a successful preliminary campaign, any success in short, to say nothing of so great a one. If he could show himself once more the inimitable Captain, the thunderbolt of war, the organizer of victory, the Napoleon of other days, the effect upon France, at least, would be electrical. And the world would again take notice.

The Emperor had to admit that, save in the army, there had not been much response from tired-out, exhausted France, to the appeals of its once irresistible and beloved leader. But the spirit of the army was that of devotion itself. There was a kind of a blind madness in it of which men spoke afterward as a phenomenon that could only be recognized, that could never be explained or understood. They could not account for it. Yet it was a powerful factor, the most powerful, indeed, that enabled the Emperor to accomplish so much, and fall short of complete triumph by so narrow a margin.

The spirit of this new army was not that burning love of liberty which had animated the armies of the early republic and turned its tattered legions into paladins. It was not the heroic consecration of the veterans of later years to their native land. It was a strange, mysterious obsession, a personal attachment to Napoleon, the individual—an unlimited, unbounded tribute to his fascination, to his own unique personality. It has not died out, and seems destined to live. Even in death Napoleon, after a century, exercises the same fascination over all sorts and conditions of men! Wise and foolish alike acknowledge his spell. Men hate, men loathe much of that for which the Corsican adventurer and soldier of fortune stood; they see clearly and admit freely the thorough and entire selfishness of the colossal man, but they cannot resist his appeal, even after one hundred years!

Yet in the long run no personal attachment, however deep, however ardent, however complete, can take the place as the inspiration for heroic deeds of that deeper passion of love of country. Nor can any personal devotion to a mere man produce such a steadfastness of character as is brought about by adherence to a great cause or a great land. A great passion like the love of a people for a great country and that for which it stands is eternal. Usually the feet of clay upon which the idol stands have only to be recognized to dissipate the ardor and fervor of the worshipers. But Napoleon was then an exception to all rules. Though he slew men, wasted them, threw them away, they trusted him. We look at him through the vista of years and in some way understand his soldiers. Reason to the contrary, we can experience in some degree, at least, even in the cold-blooded humanitarian materialism of the present, the old thrill and the old admiration. Did his contemporaries love him because they believed he thought in terms of France, we wonder?

So that this body of soldiery was probably the most formidable army in the quality of its units that had ever been mustered on the globe. There was not a man in it who was not a veteran. Some of them were veterans of fifteen years of campaigning with Napoleon. This that came was to be the sixtieth pitched battle in which some of them had participated. Even the younger men had gone through more than one campaign and taken part in much hard fighting. Back from the prisons where they had been confined and the great fortresses they had held until the Emperor's abdication had come the veterans. The Old Guard had been reconstituted. As a reward for its action at Grenoble, the Fifth-of-the-Line had been incorporated in it as a supplementary regiment, a second Fifth regiment of Grenadiers. The ranks of the Guard had been most carefully culled, the unserviceable had been weeded out, their places taken by men well fitted by their record, their physical prowess and their personal appearance to belong to that famous corps. Not the Immortals of Xerxes, the Spartan Band of Leonidas, the Companion Cavalry of Alexander, the Carthaginians of Hannibal, the Tenth Legion of Caesar, the Spanish Infantry of Parma, or the Ironsides of Cromwell, had surpassed the record of these Pretorians of Imperial France.

The same weeding-out process had been carried out in the rest of the army. The flower of French cavalry, the matchless French artillery and the famous infantry which had trampled down the world were ranged under the Eagles. Other corps had been drained for equipment. But in some particulars the army differed from the Imperial armies of the past. With two exceptions, the great Marshals were not there. Murat, king of horsemen and swordsmen, was a prisoner in his ignoble Neapolitan realm awaiting trial and execution. Marmont and Mortier dared not present themselves before the Emperor they had betrayed. Willy Massena, the wisest and ablest of them all, was old and in convenient retirement. Macdonald, the incorruptible, was with the fat-bodied, fat-witted Bourbon King in Ghent. Berthier, with his marvelous mastery of detail and his almost uncanny ability to translate the Emperor's thoughts even into orders, had not rejoined

the Eagles--a terrible loss, indeed.

There were but two of the Marshals of old with Napoleon. Soult, in some respects the acutest strategist and finest tactician, was Chief of Staff. He tried his best to fill Berthier's position and did it acceptably, if not with the success of that master. The other Marshal was preeminently the battle-leader, red-headed Michael Ney, the fighter of fighters, a man whose personality was worth an army-corps, whose reputation and influence with the soldiers was of the very highest.

The rest of the officers, while veterans, were younger and less-known men. Drouet d'Erlon commanded one of the corps; Reille another; Grouchy another; Druot was the leader of the Guard; Kellerman, Milhaud, Gerard and Maurice the cavalry. It was an army of veterans, officered by young men, commanded by the greatest of soldiers.

But the army had not yet "found itself." It had no natural coherence and there had been no time to acquire any. It had not yet been welded together. Officers, men, regiments, brigades, divisions were, more or less, new and strange to one another. There was a vast deal of suspicion in the ranks. The discipline was rather because of past habit than present practice. That army needed a few victories, and badly needed them. A welding process was required. Given time and success to shake it together, and it might laugh at the world.

Would it get time and win victory? That was the question. And if it got neither, what then? How would it stand up under the strain? Would the tie that bound hold in defeat? Could the rest of the army live up to the Guard, for instance? Yes, that was the grave, the all-important question.

There was an enormous disparity in numbers between the French army--or it would better be called Napoleon's army--and that of the allies he purposed to attack. The allies were to the French in the ratio of about two to one. Whatever else was lacking, Napoleon had not lost his audacity, nor when his intentions are disclosed by a study of his plans, can it be argued that his strategic intention was lacking in brilliancy or daring.

He determined with his smaller but compact and manageable army to thrust himself between the two wings of the somewhat loosely coherent enemy under its divided command; to hold off one while he smashed the other and then to concentrate upon the surviving half and mete out to it the same hard fortune. In other words, trusting to his ability, he deliberately placed his own army between two others, each of which practically equaled his own. He thrust himself within the jaws of a trap, to use a homely simile, intending to hold one arm of the trap open while he broke up the other. He intended to burst through the allied line and smash up each half in succession.

Of course there was always the danger that he could not burst through that line; or that he could not hold back one half while he fought the other, or that holding back one half he could not beat the other, or having beaten one half he would be too weak to fall on the other. There was always the danger that the trap would be sprung, that he would be caught in its jaws or, to change the metaphor, that he would be like the wheat between the upper and the nether millstone. Still he did not think so, and he did not go into the undertaking blindly. As he had said, in his own case, "War was not a conjectural art," and he had most carefully counted the cost, estimated the probabilities. In short, he looked well before he leaped--yet a man may look well and leap wrong after all.

On these considerations he based his grand strategy. The army of the Prussians had approached the French frontier from the east; the army of the English and allies from the northwest. Napoleon had a complete knowledge of one of the Captains opposing him. He knew and accurately estimated Blucher. He did not know and he did not accurately estimate Wellington. He viewed the latter with contempt; the former with a certain amount of disdainful approbation, for while Blucher was no strategist and less of a tactician, he was a fighter and a fighter is always dangerous and to be dreaded. Gneisenau, a much more accomplished soldier, was Blucher's second in command, but he was a negligible factor in the Emperor's mind. The fact that Wellington had beaten all of Napoleon's Marshals with whom he had come in contact had intensified the Emperor's hatred. Instead of begetting caution in dealing with him, Napoleon's antagonism had blinded him as to Wellington's ability.

He also rated the Prussians higher than the English as fighters, and when his officers, who had felt the power of the thin red line which had so often wrecked the French column, explained to him that there were no better defensive fighters on earth than the English, not even the Russians, he had laughed them to scorn, attributing their warnings to the fact that they had been beaten in Spain and had grown timid. The Emperor did not purpose to be beaten in France or Belgium by the stolid English.

In more detail his first plan was to confuse Wellington, who held the right of the allied line, then fall upon him before he had time to concentrate, and beat him or contain him with a detachment under Ney, while the Emperor in person thereafter put Blucher to rout--and all of these things he came very near accomplishing completely. Certainly, he

carried out his plans successfully and to the letter until the final day of battle.

He reasoned that if he could beat Blucher and threaten his communications, what was left of the Prussian army, which Napoleon hoped would not be much, would immediately retreat eastward; and that when Blucher had been thrown out of the game for the present, he could turn on Wellington and his English and allies and make short work of him. It did not occur to him that even if he beat Blucher and beat Wellington, provided the defeats did not end in utter routs, and they both retreated, they might withdraw on parallel lines and effect a junction later when even after the double defeat they would still so greatly outnumber him that his chances of success would be faint indeed.

The possibility of their pursuing any other course than that he had forecast for them never entered his mind. His own conception of their action was, in fact, an obsession with him. Yet that which he thought they would do they did not; and that which he was confident they would not do they did!

CHAPTER XXIX

WATERLOO--THE FINAL REVIEW

In a romance like this, in which campaigns and marches, maneuvers and battles, however decisive they may be in history, are only incidental to the careers of the characters herein presented to the reader, it is not necessary for the chronicler to turn himself into a military historian, much as he would like it. Therefore, in great restraint, he presses on, promising hereafter only so much history as may serve to show forth the somber background.

In this setting of the scene of the great drama to be played, young Marteau has been necessarily somewhat lost sight of. He was very much in evidence during that hundred days of feverish and frantic activity. Napoleon had distinguished him highly. He had given him the rank of a Colonel of the Guard, but he had still retained him on his staff. Good and experienced staff-officers were rare, and the Emperor needed all he could get; he could have used many more than were available. And as Marteau was one of those who were attached to the Emperor by the double motive of love of the man and love of his country, believing as he did that the destiny of the two could not be dis severed, he had served the Emperor most efficiently, with that blind, passionate devotion to duty by which men give to a cause the best that is in them and which sometimes leads them to almost inconceivable heights of achievements.

Suffice it to say that the great strategic conception of Napoleon was carried out with rather striking success in the first three days of the campaign. The Emperor, crossing the Sambre, interposed himself between Wellington and Blucher, completely deceived the Englishman, who thought his extreme right was threatened, detached Ney to seize the village of Quatre Bras, where Wellington had at last decided to concentrate, and with eighty thousand men fell on the Prussians at Ligny.

Ney did not seize Quatre Bras; Wellington got there ahead of him and stubbornly held the position. Although Ney had twice the number of troops at the beginning of the battle that the English Field-Marshal could muster, they were not well handled and no adequate use was made of the French preponderance. Napoleon, on the far right of Ney, at Ligny, on the contrary, fought the Prussians with his old-time skill and brilliance. The contending forces there were about equal, the Prussians having the advantage in numbers, but victory finally declared for the Emperor. It was the last victory, not the least brilliant and not the least desperately fought of his long career. The importance and quality of the battle has been lost sight of in the greater struggle of Waterloo, which took place two days after, but it was a great battle, nevertheless. One of the crude ways in which to estimate a battle is by what is called the "butcher's bill" and eighteen thousand dead and wounded Prussians and twelve thousand Frenchmen tells its tale. But it was not the decisive battle that Napoleon had planned to make it.

The Prussians retreated. They had to. But they retreated in good order. Blucher having been unhorsed and temporarily incapacitated in a charge, the command and direction of the retreat devolved upon Gneisenau. His chief claim to military distinction lies in the fact that he did not do what Napoleon expected, and what Blucher would have done. He retreated to the north instead of the east! A pursuit was launched, but it did not pursue the Prussians. It went off, as it were, into thin air. It pursued Napoleon's idea, his forecast, which owing to the accident to Blucher was wrong!

One reason why the victory of Ligny and the drawn battle at Quatre Bras were not decisive was because of a strange lack of generalship and a strange confusion of orders for which Napoleon and Ney are both responsible. Ney

was constructively a victor at Quatre Bras, finally. That is, the English retreated at nightfall and abandoned the field to him; but they retreated not because they were beaten but because Wellington, finding his position could be bettered by retirement and concentration, decided upon withdrawal. But Ney could have been the victor in every sense, in spite of his indifferent tactics, if it had not been for the same blunder that the Emperor committed.

D'Erlon, at the head of perhaps the finest corps in the army, numbering twenty thousand men, through the long hours of that hot June day marched from the vicinity of Quatre Bras to Ligny, whence he could actually see the battle raging, only to be summoned back from Ligny to Quatre Bras by orders from Ney. Retracing his course, therefore, he marched back over the route he had just traversed, arriving at Quatre Bras too late to be of any service to Ney! Like the famous King of France who with twenty thousand men marched up the hill and then marched down again, this splendid corps which, thrown into either battle, would have turned the Prussian retreat into a rout on the one hand, or have utterly cut to pieces Wellington on the other, did nothing. The principal fault was Napoleon's. He saw d'Erlon's corps approaching, but he sent no order and took no steps to put it into the battle.

Well, in spite of the fact that the energies of d'Erlon had been spent in marching instead of fighting, the Emperor was a happy man that night. He had got himself safely placed between the two armies and he had certainly severely if not decisively beaten one of them. Strategically, his operations had been characterized by unusual brilliancy. If things went as he hoped, surmised and confidently expected, all would be well. He was absolutely sure that Blucher was retiring to the east, toward Namur. He dispatched Grouchy with thirty-five thousand of his best men to pursue him in the direction which he supposed he had taken.

Napoleon's orders were positive, and he was accustomed to exact implicit obedience from his subordinates. He had a habit of discouraging independent action in the sternest of ways, and for the elimination of this great force from the subsequent battle the Emperor himself must accept the larger responsibility. But all this does not excuse Grouchy. He carried out his orders faithfully, to be sure, but a more enterprising and more independent commander would have sooner discovered that he was pursuing stragglers and would earlier have taken the right course to regain his touch with his chief and to harry the Prussian Field-Marshal. He did turn to the north at last, but when the great battle was joined he was miles away and of no more use than if he had been in Egypt. His attack on the Prussian rear-guard at Wavre, while it brought about a smart little battle with much hard and gallant fighting, really amounted to nothing and had absolutely no bearing on the settlement of the main issue elsewhere. He did not disobey orders, but many a man has gained immortality and fame by doing that very thing. Grouchy had his chance and failed to improve it. He was a veteran and a successful soldier, too.

Comes the day of Waterloo. Blucher had retreated north to Wavre and was within supporting distance of Wellington. His army had been beaten but not crushed, its spirit was not abated. The old Prussian Marshal, badly bruised and shaken from being unhorsed and overridden in a cavalry charge in which he had joined like a common trooper, but himself again, promised in a famous interview between the two to come to the support of the younger English Marshal, should he be attacked, with his whole army. Wellington had retreated as far as he intended to. He established his headquarters on a hill called Mont St. Jean, back of a ridge near a village called Waterloo, where his army commanded the junction point of the highroads to the south and west. He drew up his lines, his red-coated countrymen and his blue-coated allies on the long ridge in front of Mont St. Jean, facing south, overlooking a gently sloping valley which was bounded by other parallel ridges about a mile away. On the right center of Wellington's lines, a short distance below the crest of the ridge, embowered in trees, lay a series of stone buildings, in extent and importance between a chateau and a farmhouse, called Hougomont. These were surrounded by a stone wall and the place was impregnable against everything but artillery if it were properly manned and resolutely held. Both those conditions were met that day. Opposite the left center of the Duke's line was another strong place, a farmhouse consisting of a series of stone buildings on three sides of a square, the fourth closed by a wall, called La Haye Sainte. These outposts were of the utmost value, rightly used.

The Duke had sixty-seven thousand men and one hundred and eighty guns. His right had been strengthened at the expense of his left, because he expected Napoleon to attack the right and he counted on Blucher's arrival to support his left. To meet him Napoleon had seventy-five thousand men and two hundred and sixty guns. Off to the northeast lay Blucher at Wavre with nearly eighty thousand more men and two hundred guns, and wandering around in the outer darkness was Grouchy with thirty-five thousand.

The valley was highly cultivated. The ripening grain still stood in the fallow fields separated by low hedges. Broad roads ran through the valley in different directions. The weather was horrible. It rained torrents during the night and the earlier part of the morning. The fields were turned into quagmires, the roads into morasses. It was hot and close. The humidity was great. Little air was stirring. Throughout the day the mist hung heavy over the valley and the ridges which bordered it. But the rain ceased in the morning and Napoleon made no attack until afternoon, waiting for the

ground to dry out somewhat. It was more important to him that his soldiers should have good footing than to the English, for the offensive, the attack, the charge fell to him. Wellington determined to fight strictly on the defensive. Nevertheless, precious hours were wasted. Every passing moment brought some accession to the allied army, and every passing hour brought Blucher nearer. With all the impetuosity of his soul, the old man was urging his soldiers forward over the horrible roads.

"Boys," he said in his rough, homely way to some bitterly complaining artillerists stalled in the mud, "I promised. You would not have me break my word, would you?"

Grouchy meanwhile had at last determined that the Prussians had gone the other way. He had learned that they were at Wavre and he had swung about and was coming north. Of course, he should have marched toward the sound of the cannon--generally the safest guide for a soldier!--but, at any rate, he was trying to get into touch with the enemy. No one can question his personal courage or his loyalty to his cause.

Napoleon, when he should have been on the alert, was very drowsy and dull that day at Waterloo. He had shown himself a miracle of physical strength and endurance in that wonderful four days of campaigning and fighting, but the soldiers passing by the farmhouse of La Belle Alliance--singular name which referred so prophetically to the enemy--sometimes saw him sitting on a chair by a table outside the house, his feet resting on a bundle of straw to keep them from the wet ground, nodding, asleep! And no wonder. It is doubtful if he had enjoyed as much as eight hours of sleep since he crossed the Sambre, and those not consecutive! Still, if ever he should have kept awake, that eighteenth of June was the day of days!

So far as one can discern his intention, his battle plan had been to feint at Hougomont on the right center, cause the Duke of Wellington to weaken his line to support the chateau, and then to break through the left center and crush him by one of those massed attacks under artillery fire for which he had become famous. The line once broken, the end, of course, would be more or less certain.

The difference in the temperaments of the two great Captains was well illustrated before the battle was joined. The Duke mainly concealed his men behind the ridge. All that the French saw when they came on the field were guns, officers and a few men. The English-Belgian army was making no parade. What the British and Flemish saw was very different. The Emperor displayed his full hand. The French, who appeared not to have been disorganized at all by the hard fighting at Ligny and Quatre Bras, came into view in most splendid style; bands playing, drums rolling, swords waving, bayonets shining even in the dull air of the wretched morning. They came on the field in solid columns, deployed and took their positions, out of cannon-shot range, of course, in the most deliberate manner. The uniforms of the army were brand-new, and it was the fashion to fight in one's best in those days. They presented a magnificent spectacle.

Presently the Duke, his staff, the gunners and the others who were on the top of the ridge and watching, saw a body of horsemen gallop rapidly along the French lines. One gray-coated figure riding a white horse was in advance of the rest. The cheers, the almost delirious shouts and cries, told the watchers that it was the Emperor. It was his last grand review, his last moment of triumph.

It was after one o'clock before the actual battle began. More books have been written about that battle than any other that was ever fought. One is tempted to say, almost than all others that were ever fought. And the closest reasoners arrive at different conclusions and disagree as to many vital and important details. The Duke of Wellington himself left two accounts, one in his dispatches and one in notes written long afterward, which were irreconcilable, but some things are certain, upon some things all historians are agreed.

The battle began with an attack on the Hougomont Chateau and the conflict actually raged around that chateau for over six hours, or until the French were in retreat. Macdonell, Home and Saltoun, Scotsmen all, with their regiments of the Household Guard, held that chateau, although it was assailed over and over again, finally, by the whole of Reille's corps. They held that chateau, although it burned over their heads, although the French actually broke into it on occasion. They held it, although every other man in it was shot down and scarcely a survivor was without a wound. It was assaulted with a fury and a resolution which was only matched by the fury and resolution of its defense. Why it was not battered to pieces with artillery no one knows. At any rate, it occupied practically the whole of Reille's corps during the whole long afternoon of fighting.

The space between Hougomont and La Haye Sainte was about a thousand yards. La Haye Sainte was assaulted also but, to anticipate events, it held out until about five o'clock in the evening, when, after another wonderful defense, it was carried. The French established themselves in it eighty yards from Wellington's line.

CHAPTER XXX

WATERLOO--THE CHARGE OF D'ERLON

Meanwhile the French had not confined their efforts to the isolated forts, if they may be so called, on Wellington's center and left center. After a tremendous artillery duel d'Erlon's men had been formed up for that massed attack for which the Emperor was famous, and with which it was expected the English line would be pierced and the issue decided. The Emperor, as has been noted, had intended the attack on Hougomont as a mere feint, hoping to induce the Duke of Wellington to reinforce his threatened right and thereby to weaken his left center. It was no part of the Emperor's plan that an attempt to capture Hougomont should become the main battle on his own left that it had, nor could he be sure that even the tremendous attack upon it had produced the effect at which he aimed. Nevertheless, the movement of d'Erlon had to be tried.

It must be remembered that Napoleon had never passed through the intermediate army grades. He had been jumped from a regimental officer to a General. He had never handled a regiment, a brigade, a division, a corps--only an army, or armies. Perhaps that was one reason why he was accustomed to leaving details and the execution of his plans to subordinates. He was the greatest of strategists and the ablest of tacticians, but minor tactics did not interest him, and the arrangement of this great assault he left to the corps and its commander.

Giving orders to Ney and d'Erlon, therefore, the Emperor at last launched his grand attack. One hundred and twenty guns were concentrated on that part of the English left beyond the westernmost of the two outlying positions, through which it was determined to force a way. Under cover of the smoke, which all day hung thick and heavy in the valley and clung to the ridges, d'Erlon's splendid corps, which had been so wasted between Quatre Bras and Ligny, and which was burning to achieve something, was formed in four huge parallel close-ranked columns, slightly echeloned under Donzelot, Marcognet, Durutte and Allix. With greatly mistaken judgment, these four columns were crowded close together. The disposition was a very bad one. In the first place, their freedom of movement was so impaired by lack of proper distance as to render deployment almost impossible. Unless the columns could preserve their solid formation until the very point of contact, the charge would be a fruitless one. In the second place, they made an enormous target impossible to miss. The attack was supported by light batteries of artillery and the cavalry in the flanks.

Other things being equal, the quality of soldiers being the same, the column is at an obvious disadvantage when attacking the line. It was so in this instance. Although it was magnificently led by Ney and d'Erlon in person, and although it comprised troops of the highest order, the division commanders being men of superb courage and resolution, no valor, no determination could make up for these disadvantages. The tremendous artillery-fire of the French, which did great execution among the English, kept them down until the dark columns of infantry mounting the ridge got in the way of the French guns which, of course, ceased to fire.

The drums were rolling madly, the Frenchmen were cheering loudly when the ridge was suddenly covered with long red lines. There were not many blue-coated allies left. Many of them had already laid down their lives; of the survivors more were exhausted by the fierce battling of the preceding days when the Belgians had nobly sustained the fighting traditions of a race to which nearly two thousand years before Caesar himself had borne testimony. As a matter of fact, most of the allies were moved to the rear. They did not leave the field. They were formed up again back of the battle line to constitute the reserve. The English did not intend to flee either. They were not accustomed to it and they saw no reason for doing it now.

Wellington moved the heavy cavalry over to support the threatened point of the line and bade his soldiers restrain their fire. There was something ominous in the silent, steady, rock-like red wall. It was much more threatening to the mercuric Gallic spirit than the shouting of the French was to the unemotional English disposition. Still, they came intrepidly on.

Meanwhile, renewed attacks were hurled against the chateau and the farmhouse. Ney and d'Erlon had determined to break the English line with the bayonet. Suddenly, when the French came within point-blank range, the English awoke to action. The English guns hurled shot into the close-ranked masses, each discharge doing frightful execution. Ney's horse was shot from under him at the first fire. But the unwounded Marshal scrambled to his feet and, mounting another horse, pressed on.

The slow-moving ranks were nearer. At point-blank range the English infantrymen now opened fire. Shattering discharges were poured upon the French. The fronts of the divisions were obliterated. The men in advance who survived would have given back, but the pressure of the masses in their rear forced them to go on. The divisions actually broke into a run. Again and again the British battalions spoke, the black muskets in the hands of the red coats were tipped with redder flame. It was not in human flesh and blood to sustain very long such a fire.

It was a magnificent charge, gloriously delivered, and such was its momentum that it almost came in touch with the English line. It did not quite. That momentum was spent at last. The French deployed as well as they could in the crowded space and at half-pistol-shot distance began to return the English fire. The French guns joined in the infernal tumult. The advance had been stopped, but it had not been driven back. The French cavalry were now coming up. Before they arrived that issue had to be decided. The critical moment was at hand, and Wellington's superb judgment determined the action. He let loose on them the heavy cavalry, led by the Scots Grays on their big horses. As the ranks of the infantry opened to give them room, the men of the Ninety-second Highlanders, mad with the enthusiasm of the moment, caught the stirrup-straps of the Horse and, half running, half dragged, joined in the charge.

The splendid body of heavy cavalry fell on the flank of the halted columns. There was no time for the French to form a square. Nay more, there was no room for them to form a square. In an instant, however, they faced about and delivered a volley which did great execution, but nothing could stop the maddened rush of the gigantic horsemen. Back on the heights of Rossomme Napoleon, aroused from his lethargy at last, stared at the great attack.

"*Mon Dieu!*" he exclaimed as he saw the tremendous onfall of the cavalymen upon his helpless infantry, "how terrible are those gray horsemen!"

Yes, they were more terrible to the men at the point of contact than they were to those back of La Belle Alliance. No infantry that ever lived in the position in which the French found themselves could have stood up against such a charge as that. Trampling, hacking, slashing, thrusting, the horses biting and fighting like the men, the heavy cavalry broke up two of the columns. The second and third began to retreat under an awful fire. But the dash of the British troopers was spent. They had become separated, disorganized. They had lost coherence. The French cavalry now arrived on the scene. Admirably handled, they were thrown on the scattered English. There was nothing for the latter to do but retire. Retire they did, having accomplished all that anyone could expect of cavalry, fighting every step of the way. Just as soon as they opened the fronts of the regiments' in line, the infantry and artillery began again, and then the French cavalry got its punishment in its turn.

It takes but moments to tell of this charge and, indeed, in the battlefield it seemed but a few moments. But the French did not give way until after long hard fighting. From the beginning of the preliminary artillery-duel to the repulse of the charge an hour and a half elapsed. Indeed, they did not give way altogether either, for Donzelot and Allix, who commanded the left divisions, were the men who finally succeeded in capturing La Haye Sainte. And both sides suffered furiously before the French gave back.

There was plenty of fight left in the French yet. Ney, whatever his strategy and tactics, showed himself as of yore the bravest of the brave. It is quite safe to say that the hero of the retreat from Russia, the last of the Grand Army, the star of many a hotly contested battle, surpassed even his own glorious record for personal courage on that day. Maddened by the repulse, he gathered up all the cavalry, twelve thousand in number, and with Kellerman, greatest of cavalymen, to second him and with division leaders like Milhaud and Maurice, he hurled himself upon the English line between Hougomont and La Haye Sainte. But the English made no tactical mistakes like that of Ney and d'Erlon. The artillerists stood to their guns until the torrent of French horsemen was about to break upon them, then they ran back to the safety of the nearest English square.

The English had been put in such formation that the squares lay checkerwise. Each side was four men deep. The front rank knelt, the second rank bent over at a charge bayonets, the third and the fourth ranks stood erect and fired. The French horsemen might have endured the tempest of bullets but they could not ride down the *chevaux de frise*, the fringe of steel. They tried it. No one could find fault with that army. It was doing its best; it was fighting and dying for its Emperor. Over and over they sought to break those stubborn British squares. One or two of them were actually penetrated, but unavailingly.

Men mad with battle-lust threw themselves and their horses upon the bayonets. The guns were captured and recaptured. The horsemen overran the ridge, they got behind the squares, they counter-charged over their own tracks, they rode until the breasts of the horses touched the guns. They fired pistols in the face of the English. One such charge is enough to immortalize its makers, and during that afternoon they made twelve!

Ney, raging over the field, had five horses killed under him. The British suffered horribly. If the horsemen did draw off to take breath, and reform for another effort, the French batteries, the English squares presenting easy targets, sent ball after ball through them. And nobody stopped fighting to watch the cavalry. Far and wide the battle raged. Toward the close of the day some of the English squares had become so torn to pieces that regiments, brigades and divisions had to be combined to keep from being overwhelmed.

Still the fight raged around Hougomont. Now, from a source of strength, La Haye Sainte had become a menace. There the English attacked and the French held. Off to the northeast the country was black with advancing masses of men. No, it was not Grouchy and his thirty-five thousand who, if they had been there at the beginning, might have decided the day. It was the Prussians.

They, at least, had marched to the sound of the cannon. Grouchy was off at Wavre. He at last got in touch with one of Blucher's rear corps and he was fighting a smart little battle ten miles from the place where the main issue was to be decided. As a diversion, his efforts were negligible, for without that corps the allies outnumbered the French two to one.

Telling the troops that the oncoming soldiers were their comrades of Grouchy's command who would decide the battle, Napoleon detached the gallant Lobau, who had stood like a stone wall at Aspern, with the Young Guard to seize the village of Planchenoit and to hold the Prussians back, for if they broke in the end would be as certain as it was swift. And well did Lobau with the Young Guard perform that task. Bulow, commanding the leading corps, hurled himself again and again upon the French line. His heavy columns fared exactly as the French columns had fared when they assaulted the English. But it was not within the power of ten thousand men to hold off thirty thousand forever, and there were soon that number of Prussians at the point of contact. Frantic messages from Lobau caused the Emperor to send one of the divisions of the Old Guard, the last reserve, to his support.

It was now after six o'clock, the declining sun was already low on the horizon, the long June day was drawing to a close. The main force of the Prussians had not yet come up to the hill and ridge of Mont St. Jean. Wellington, in great anxiety, was clinging desperately to the ridge with his shattered lines wondering how long he could hold them, whether he could sustain another of those awful attacks. His reserves, except two divisions of light cavalry, Vivian's and Vandeleur's, and Maitland's and Adams' brigades headed by Colborne's famous Fifty-second Foot, among his troops the de luxe veterans of the Peninsula, had all been expended.

Lobau was still holding back the Prussians by the most prodigious and astounding efforts. If Napoleon succeeded in his last titanic effort to break that English line, Blucher would be too late. Unless night or Blucher came quickly, if Napoleon made that attack and it was not driven back, victory in this struggle of the war gods would finally go to the French.

Hougomont still held out. The stubborn defense of it was Wellington's salvation. While it stood his right was more or less protected. But La Haye Sainte offered a convenient point of attack upon him. If Napoleon brought up his remaining troops behind it they would only have a short distance to go before they were at death's grapple hand to hand with the shattered, exhausted, but indomitable defenders of the ridge.

CHAPTER XXXI

WATERLOO--THE LAST OF THE GUARD

Long and earnestly, one from the heights of Mont St. Jean, the other from those of Rossomme, the two great Captains scanned the opposing line. Napoleon seemed to have recovered from his indisposition. Indeed, he had undergone frightful fatigues which would have been incredible if sustained by a younger man, and which would have been impossible to any other man than he. To add to his fatigue, he was ill. He could not sleep and the nature of his illness was such that it was agony for him to mount a horse. This condition had been aggravated by the awful exertion, physical and mental, he had made and the strain of that long afternoon of desperate fighting. Nor had he eaten anything the livelong day. Yet at about half after six that night he did get into the saddle again. Conquering his anguish, he rode down to the fifteen battalions of the Guard still held in reserve at La Belle Alliance, all that was left intact of that proud and gallant army.

"My children," he said hoarsely in last appeal, "I must sleep in Brussels to-night. There is the enemy. Go and break the English line for me."

Cambronne, to whom nature and education alike had denied every attribute of grace or greatness except unbounded devotion and stubborn courage, mustered the Guard. Ney, *le terrible Rougeaud*, the soldiers' idol, his torn uniform covered with dust, one of his epaulets slashed from his shoulder, his coat open, his shirt likewise, his bared breast black with powder, his face red-streaked with blood, for many bullets had grazed him, his hair matted with sweat--the weather had grown frightfully hot, the air was terribly humid--his eyes blazing, flecks of foam about his mouth, placed himself in the lead. Every staff officer left joined the great Marshal.

With the brass drums beating "*La Grenadiere*," that famous grenadier quick-step, the great Guard moved out. Here, again, in the excitement of the conflict, an opportunity was overlooked. They could have gone up in rear of La Haye Sainte with practically no danger, but they went straight out into the open, between farm and chateau. Up the road, over the fields of bloody grain, through the torn hedges, trampling over the bodies of their comrades, the last hope advanced to meet the enemy.

All over the field the tide of battle ebbed and flowed. The armies came together for the last try. Off to the right Lobau still held his appointed station, but now the Prussians in great masses were swarming on the field about Planchenoit. Division after division, avoiding Lobau meanwhile, mounted the ridge to join the English line. It had almost been broken by d'Erlon at La Haye Sainte. Mouffling, Wellington's Prussian aide, had galloped over to Ziethen in command of the advance with the news that unless the English were reinforced heavily at once their line would be pierced and they would be routed. On to the field opposite La Haye Sainte came the Prussians. Still raged the battle around Hougomont and the English right, but the eyes of every spectator not engaged in fighting for his life were concentrated on the advance of the Guard.

Napoleon had ridden down from Rossomme to La Belle Alliance. He sat his horse within easy cannon-shot of the English as the devoted Guard passed by in its last review. His physical pain was forgot in the great anxiety with which he watched them. The battle was practically lost. This was the last desperate throw of the gambler, the last stake he could place upon the board. He knew it, every officer knew it, perhaps even the more experienced grenadiers like old Bullet-Stopper of the Guard knew it. That did not matter to them. They were his men and at his word, for him, they were going forward to conquer or die.

Tramp, tramp, tramp, keeping time to the long continuous rolling of the drums whose notes were heard even above the roar of the cannon and the tumult of the battle, the Guard, from whose lips came one continuous cry of "*Vive l'Empereur!*" marched forward. Covered as usual by the fire of one of those great batteries of concentrated guns so conspicuous in Napoleonic tactics, through the smoke and the mist and the shadows of the evening, they passed on. Napoleon himself with three battalions in reserve followed a little distance behind them.

Now they were mounting the hill, now they were abreast of La Haye Sainte; now the ridge in front of them was topped with English. Away off could be heard the thunder of the oncoming Prussian horsemen, the roar of the Prussian guns. Back of the ridge the brigades of light cavalry stood ready. The infantry reserve with brave Colborne and the Fifty-second, thirteen hundred strong, in the lead, were quivering with excitement. Even the stolid British phlegm had vanished. This was the last supreme moment. Throbbled wildly the usually steady hearts of the cool islanders. If they could stop this grand advance the battle would be gained. The hill would be held. Could they do it? And if not----!

Out of the smoke and mist opposite the English soldiers of the Royal Guard came their Imperial enemies. The waiting British saw the black bearskins of the tall Guard, the imperial insignia on cross-belts and uniforms. They were so near that they could see the grim faces of the old soldiers, their mustaches working, their lips drawn back over their teeth, snarling, sputtering like savage beasts. Here and there mouths were tight shut in a firm line. Here and there men came silently, but mostly they were yelling. And they came up, arms apart, after the precept and example of Dorsenne, *le beau Dorsenne*, alas, no longer with them, to try conclusions for the last time with the soldiers' white weapon, the bayonet, cold steel! Would the English wait for that? They would not.

"Fire!" cried an English voice just when the suspense had become unbearable.

The heavens were shattered by the discharge. Ney pitched from his horse, the sixth that day to be shot under him. He was up in a moment, his sword out. He advanced on foot at the head of the Guard. It was his last charge. He was to face muskets again, but in Paris, in the hands of a firing-squad, with his back to the wall. He was not given the coveted privilege of dying on that stricken field, though he sought for it wildly everywhere, but when he did die it was as he had lived, undaunted. Now, his great voice uplifted, he led forward the devoted and immortal band. His sword was shot

out of his hand. Seizing a gun and a bayonet from a falling grenadier, he fought in the ranks as in Russia.

Again, the tactics were faulty, as d'Erlon's men the Guard came in solid columns. Right in front of the rapid-firing English, the muskets and cannon in one continuous roar now, they sought to deploy and return that terrible withering fire. The Prussian infantry, panting like dogs, now gained the crest of the ridge and, animated by more than human hatred, fell into disorderly but determined lines and opened fire. Harsh German oaths and exclamations mingled with hearty English curses and cheers. The Guard was firing rapidly now, straight into the faces of the English. And still the columns came on. Like a great wave which rushes forward at first swiftly and then goes slower and slower and slower as it rolls up the beach it advanced. By and by it stopped. The end was at hand. With bent heads the men stood and took the hail of lead and iron.

"Come!" said Ney, frantic with battle fever. "Come! See how a Marshal of France can die."

Now was the crucial moment. The Iron Duke saw it. The two armies were face to face firing into each other. To which side would the victory incline? He spoke to Maitland, to Adams, to Colborne. That gallant soldier threw his men on the exposed flank of the column which had obliqued, bent to the right. Before they could face about out of the smoke came the yelling English! They found the men on the flank of the column the next morning just where it had stood lying in ordered ranks dead.

Still they did not give back. Vivian and Vandeleur, daring light horsemen, were now hurled on the devoted division. At it they ran. On it they fell. Still it stood. It was incredible. It was almost surrounded now. The attack had failed. To advance was impossible, to retreat was dishonor. They would stand! Their case was hopeless. Appeals were made for the survivors to lay down their arms and surrender. Into the faces of the assailants vulgar but heroic Cambronne hurled a disgusting but graphic word. No, nobody said so, but the Guard would not surrender. It would die.

Back of his Guard, the Emperor, having stopped not far from the chateau, watched them die. He was paler than ever, sweat poured from his face, his eyes and lips twitched nervously and spasms of physical pain added their torture to the mental agony of the moment. He muttered again and again:

"Mon Dieu! Mais ils sont meles ensemble."

Now the Prussian horsemen, the Death-head Hussars, added their weight to Vandeleur's and Vivian's swordsmen and lancers. Other regiments supplemented the withering fire of the advancing Fifty-second and the reserve brigades. Now, at last, the Guard began to give back. Slowly, reluctantly, clinging to their positions, fighting, firing, savage, mad--they began to give way.

"*Tout est perdu,*" whispered Napoleon.

"The Guard retreats!" cried someone near the Emperor.

"*La Garde recule!*" rose here and there from the battlefield. "*La Garde recule!*" Men caught up the cry in wonder and despair. Could it be true? Yes. Back they came out of the smoke. Now was the supreme opportunity for the allies. The Duke, recklessly exposing himself on the crest of the hill, bullets flying about him, as they flew about Napoleon, yet leading apparently a charmed life, closed his field-glass and turned to the red line that had made good its defense.

"Up!" he cried, waving his hand and not finishing his sentence.

They needed no other signal. Their time to attack had come. Down the hill they rushed, yelling, followed by Belgians, Netherlanders, and all the rest, pressing hard upon their heels. La Haye Sainte was recaptured in the twinkling of an eye. The shattered broken remains of the Guard were driven in headlong rout. The assailers of Hougomont were themselves assaulted. At last numbers had overwhelmed Lobau. The survivors of an army of a hundred and thirty thousand flushed with victory fell on the survivors of an army of seventy thousand already defeated.

At half-past seven the battle was lost. At eight the withdrawal became a retreat, the retreat a rout. At set of sun lost was the Emperor, lost was the Empire. Ended was the age-long struggle which had begun with the fall of the Bastille more than a score of years before. Once again from France, with the downfall of Napoleon, had been snatched the hegemony of the world.

There was no reserve. There was nothing to cover a retreat. Someone raised the wild cry not often heard on battlefields overlooked by Napoleon, and it was echoed everywhere:

"Sauve qui peut."

The army as an army was gone. Thousands of men in mad terror fled in every direction. Still, there were left a few battalions of the Guard which had not been in action. They formed three squares to receive the English and Prussians. Into the nearest square Napoleon, bewildered, overwhelmed, stricken by the catastrophe, was led on his horse. His sword was out. He would fain have died on that field. Doubtless, many a bullet marked him, but none struck him. For a little while these squares of the Guard, Napoleon in the center one, another square on either side of the center one, stayed the British and Prussian advance, but it was not to be. "The stars in their courses fought against Sisera!" The Emperor gave no order. Bertrand and Soult turned his horse about and the squares retreated.

It was night. They were the sole organized body left. Well, they upheld their ancient fame and glorious reputation and untarnished honor. Through the calm and moonlit night pursuers and pursued could hear the rolling of the brass drums far and wide over the countryside as the Guard marched away from that field back to stricken France, to that famous grenadier march, "*La Grenadiere*."

Again and again they stopped to beat off the furious attack of the cavalry. Again and again the Prussian pursuers hurled themselves unavailingly on quadrangles of steel, worked up to a terrible pitch of excitement by the possibility that they might seize the Emperor at whose behest and for whose purpose fifty thousand men lay dead or wounded on that fatal hill, in that dreadful valley. Happy the fate of those who were dead--horrible the condition of those who were wounded. English, Prussians, Germans, Bavarians, Hollanders, French, trampled together in indistinguishable masses. Horses, guns, weapons, equipment--everything in hopeless confusion. Every horror, every anguish, every agony was there--incense burned about the altar of one devouring ambition.

CHAPTER XXXII

AT LAST THE EAGLE AND THE WOMAN

Nearest the crest of the hill immortalized by the great conflict, in advance of but in touch with the regular dead lines of the Guard, a little group, friend and foe, lay intermingled. There was a young officer of the Fifty-second infantry, one of Colborne's. He was conscious but suffering frightfully from mortal wounds. One side of his face where he had been thrown into the mud was covered with a red compound of earth and blood; his bright head was dabbled with the same hideous mixture. Blood frothed out of his mouth as he breathed. He murmured from time to time a woman's name. "Water," was sometimes the sputtering syllable that came from him.

His left hand clutched uneasily at his breast, where his torn uniform showed a gaping wound. But his right hand was still. The arm was broken, paralyzed, but the fingers of his right hand were tightly closed around a broken blue staff and next to his cheek, the blood-stained one, and cold against it, was a French Eagle. He had seized that staff in the heat of battle and in the article of death he held it.

At the feet of the English officer lay a French officer wearing the insignia of a Colonel of the Guard. He was covered with wounds, bayonet thrusts, a saber-slash, and was delirious. Although helpless, he was really in much better case than the young Englishman. He, too, in his delirium muttered a woman's name.

They spoke different tongues, these two. They were born in different lands. They were children of the same God, although one might have doubted it, but no one could mistake the woman's name. For there Frank Yeovil and Jean Marteau, incapable of doing each other any further harm, each thought of the same woman.

Did Laure d'Aumenier back in England waiting anxiously for news of battle, fearing for one of those men, hear those piteous, broken murmurs of a woman's name--her own?

Around these two were piled the dead. Marteau had seized the Eagle. Yes, he and a few brave men had stayed on the field when the great Ney, raging like a madman, and seeking in vain the happy fortune of a bullet or sword-thrust, had been swept away, and on him had fallen Yeovil with another group of resolute English, and together they had fought their little battle for the Eagle. And Marteau had proved the Englishman's master. He had beaten him down. He had shortened his sword to strike when he recognized him. Well, the battle was over, the Eagle was lost, the Emperor was a fugitive, hope died with the retreating Guard, the Empire was ended. Marteau might have killed him, but to what end?

"For your wife's sake," he cried, lowering his sword, and the next minute he paid for his mercy, for the other English threw themselves upon him.

But Frank Yeovil did not get off scot free. There was one lad who had followed Marteau, who had marched with the Guard, who had no compunctions of conscience whatever, and with his last pistol Pierre gave the reeling Englishman the fatal shot. Yes, Pierre paid too. They would certainly have spared him, since he was only a boy, but maddened by the death of their officer, half a dozen bayonets were plunged into his breast.

Thither the next day came Sir Gervaise Yeovil, who had been with the Duke at the Duchess of Richmond's famous ball in Brussels. Young Frank had left that ball at four o'clock in the morning, according to order, only to find that later orders had directed the army to march at two and that his baggage had gone. He had fought that day in pumps and silk stockings which he had worn at the ball; dabbled, gory, muddy, they were now.

Sir Gervaise Yeovil was an old friend of the Duke of Wellington. The Iron Duke, as they called him, was nevertheless very tender-hearted that morning. He told the Baronet that his son was somewhere on the field. Colonel Colborne of the Fifty-second had marked him in the charge, but that was all. Neither Vivian nor Vandeleur could throw any light on the situation. There were twenty thousand of the allied armies on that field and thirty thousand French.

"My God," said Sir Gervaise, staring along the line of the French retreat, "what is so terrible as a defeat?"

"Nothing," said the Duke gravely. Then looking at the nearer hillside he added those tremendous words which epitomized war in a way in which no one save a great modern captain has ever epitomized it. "Nothing," he said slowly, "unless it be a victory."

They found the Guard. That was easy. There they lay in lines where they had fallen; the tall bearskins on their heads, the muskets still clasped in their hands. There, too, they found young Yeovil at last. They revived him. Someone sought to take the Eagle from him, but with a sudden accession of strength he protested against it.

"Father," he whispered to the old man bending over him, his red face pale and working, "mine."

"True," said the Duke. "He captured it. Let him keep it."

"O God!" broke out the Baronet. "Frank! Can nothing be done?"

"Nothing. Stop." His lips moved, his father bent nearer. "Laure----" he whispered.

"Yes, yes, what of her?"

"That Frenchman she loved----"

"Marteau?"

The young Englishman closed his eyes in assent.

"He could have killed me but spared--for her--he--is there," he faltered presently.

"There is life in this Frenchman yet," said one of the surgeons, looking up at the moment.

"My Lord!" said old Sir Gervaise Yeovil, starting up, choking down a sob and endeavoring to keep his voice steady. "My boy yonder----"

"Yes," said the Duke, "a brave lad."

"He's---- It is all up with him. You will let me take him back to England, and--the Frenchman and the Eagle?"

"Certainly. I wish to God it had never happened, Yeovil," went on the soldier. "But it had to be. Bonaparte had to be put down, the world freed. And somebody had to pay."

"I thank God," said the old man, "that my boy dies for his King and his country and for human liberty."

"Nor shall he die in vain," said the soldier.

Frank Yeovil died on the vessel Sir Gervaise chartered to carry him and Marteau and some other wounded officers

of his acquaintance back to England. They did not bury him at sea. At his earnest request they took him back to his own land to be laid with his ancestors, none of whom had spent themselves more gloriously or for a greater cause than he.

Marteau, frightfully weak, heart-broken and helpless, by Sir Gervaise Yeovil's command was taken to the Baronet's own house.

"I did my best," he said brokenly from the bed on which he lay as Laure d'Aumenier bent over him, Sir Gervaise standing grim and silent with folded arms in the background.

"For France and the Emperor," whispered the woman.

"Yes, that, but for your husband as well. He fell upon me. I was trying to rally the Guard--the Eagle--he was beaten down--but I recognized him. I would not have harmed him."

"He told me," said the Baronet, "what you said. 'For your wife's sake,'" he quoted in his deep voice, looking curiously at the girl.

"Sir Gervaise," said the Countess, looking up at him entreatingly, "I am alone in this world but for you. I was to have been your daughter. May I speak?"

"I wish it."

"Marteau--Jean," she said softly, "I was not his wife. Perhaps now that he is dead it would have been better if I had been, but----"

"And you are free?"

Again the Countess looked at the Englishman. Simple and homely though he was, he showed the qualities of his birth and rank.

"Mademoiselle," he began gravely, almost tenderly. He looked a long time at her. "Little Laure," he continued at last, taking her slender hand in his own great one, "I had hoped that you might some day call me father but that hope is gone--since Waterloo. If I were your real father now I should say----"

"Monsieur!" whispered the woman, her eyes brightening, her hand tightening in the clasp of the other.

"And I think the old Marquis would say that it is the will of God, now----" He bit his lip. It was all so different from what he imagined.

"Go on, if you please," whispered Marteau. "I am ill. I cannot bear----"

"If she be guided by me she will be your wife, young sir," said Sir Gervaise decisively.

He dropped the woman's hand. He turned and walked heavily out of the room without a backward glance. He could do no more.

"And will you stoop to me?" pleaded Marteau.

For answer the woman knelt by his bed and slipped her arm tenderly under his head. She bent and kissed him.

"When you are stronger," she replied, "you shall raise me up to your own high level of courage and devotion and self-sacrifice, but meanwhile it is upon my bosom that your head must lie."

"Alas," said Marteau, after a little, "the Emperor is taken, the Empire is lost, my poor France!"

"I will go back with you and we will help to build it up again," said the woman.

That was the best medicine that could be given to the young man. His recovery was slow but it was sure and it was the more rapid because of the gracious care of the woman he loved, who lavished upon him all the pent-up passion of her fond adoring heart.

Sir Gervaise Yeovil, whose interest at court was great, exerted himself to secure a reconfirmation of Marteau's

patent of nobility and to see that no difficulties were placed in the way of the young couple in obtaining repossession of their estates. So that once more there should be a d'Aumenier and perhaps a renewal of the ancient house in the old chateau in Champagne. This was easier since Marteau had never taken oath to King Louis and therefore had broken no faith.

At the quiet wedding that took place as soon as Marteau recovered his strength a little, Sir Gervaise continued to act the father's part to the poor woman. After the ceremony he delighted the heart of the soldier by giving to him what he loved after the woman, the Eagle which had been Frank Yeovil's prize.

"You will think of the lad, sometimes," said the old Baronet to the girl. "He was not lucky enough to win you, but he loved you and he died with your name on his lips."

"I shall remember him always," said the new-made wife.

"His name shall be held in highest honor in my house as a brave soldier, a true lover and a most gallant gentleman," added the new-made husband.

Marteau would never forget the picture of the Emperor sitting on his horse at La Belle Alliance that June evening, stern, terrific, almost sublime, watching the Guard go by to death. He was glad he had not seen him in the retreat of which he afterward heard from old Bal-Arret. But that was not the last picture of the Emperor that he had. Although he was scarcely strong enough to be moved, he insisted on being taken to Portsmouth with his young wife. Sir Gervaise went with him. He had no other object in life it seemed but to provide happiness for these young people. He could scarcely bear them out of his sight.

One day, a bright and sunny morning late in July, they put the convalescing soldier into a boat with his wife and the old Baronet and the three were rowed out into the harbor as near as the cordon of guard-boats allowed them to approach to a great English ship-of-the-line, across the stern of which in gold letters they read the name, "*Bellerophon*."

"Bonaparte gener'ly comes out 'n the quarter-gal'ry of the ship, 'bout this hour in the mornin'," said one of the boatmen. "An' if he does we can see him quite plain from yere."

There were other boats there whose occupants were moved by curiosity and various emotions, but when the figure of the little man with the three-cornered cocked hat on his head, still wearing the green uniform of the chasseurs of the Guard stepped out on the quarter-gallery, his eyes, as it were instinctively, sought that particular boat.

"Help me up," said Marteau brokenly.

The boat was a large one and moving carefully they got the young officer to his feet. He was wearing his own battle-stained uniform. He lifted his trembling hand to his head in salute. The little Emperor bent over the rail and stared hard at the trio. Did he recognize Marteau? Ah, yes! He straightened up presently, his own hand returned the salute and then he took off that same cocked hat and bared his brow and bent his head low and, with a gesture of farewell, he turned and reentered his cabin--Prometheus on the way to his chains at St. Helena!

THE END