

of really negotiable wealth, and then, and only then, to bring about some sort of stabilizing political process that would leave him in advantageous possession of his accumulation. Here were the factors of a bad economic atmosphere, suspicious, feverish, greedy, and speculative. . . .

In the third direction in which the Revolution had been unprepared with clear ideas, the problem of international relationships, developments were to occur that interacted disastrously with this state of financial and economic adventure, this scramble and confusion, this preoccupation of men's minds with the perplexing slipperiness of their private property and their monetary position at home. The Republic at its birth found itself at war. For a time that war was waged by the new levies with a patriotism and a zeal unparalleled in the world's history. But that could not go on. The Directory found itself at the head of a conquering country, intolerably needy and embarrassed at home, and in occupation of rich foreign lands, full of seizable wealth and material and financial opportunity. We have all double natures, and the French in particular seem to be developed logically and symmetrically on both sides. Into these conquered regions France came as a liberator, the teacher of Republicanism to mankind. Holland and Belgium became the Batavian Republic, Genoa and its Riviera the Ligurian Republic, north Italy the Cisalpine Republic, Switzerland was rechristened the Helvetic Republic, Mülhausen, Rome, and Naples were designated republics. Grouped about France, these republics were to be a constellation of freedom leading the world. That was the ideal side. At the same time the French Government, and French private individuals in concert with the Government, proceeded to a complete and exhaustive exploitation of the resources of these liberated lands.

So, within ten years of the meeting of the States General, New France begins to take on a singular likeness to the old. It is more flushed, more vigorous; it wears a cap of liberty instead of a crown; it has a new army—but a damaged fleet; it has new rich people instead of the old rich people, a new peasantry working even harder than the old and yielding more taxes; a new foreign policy curiously like the old foreign policy disrobed; and—there is no Millennium.

## CHAPTER 36

### THE CAREER OF NAPOLEON BONAPARTE

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| § 1. <i>The Bonaparte Family in Corsica.</i>   | § 4. <i>Napoleon I, Emperor, 1804-14.</i> |
| § 2. <i>Bonaparte as a Republican General.</i> | § 5. <i>The Hundred Days.</i>             |
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#### § 1

AND NOW we come to one of the most illuminating figures in modern history, the figure of an adventurer and a wrecker, whose story seems to display with an extraordinary vividness the universal subtle conflict of egotism, vanity, and personality with the weaker, wider claims of the common good. Against this background of confusion and stress and hope, this strained and heaving France and Europe, this stormy and tremendous dawn, appears this dark little archaic personage, hard, compact, capable, unscrupulous, imitative, and neatly vulgar. He was born (1769) in the still half-barbaric island of Corsica, the son of a rather prosaic father, a lawyer who had been first a patriotic Corsican against the French monarchy which was trying to subjugate Corsica, and who had then gone over to the side of the invader. His mother was of sturdier stuff, passionately patriotic and a strong and managing woman. (She birched her sons; on one occasion she birched Napoleon when he was sixteen.) There were numerous brothers and sisters, and the family pursued the French authorities with importunities for rewards and jobs. Except for Napoleon, it seems to have been a thoroughly commonplace, "hungry" family. He was clever, bad-tempered, and overbearing. From his mother he had acquired a romantic Corsican patriotism.

Through the patronage of the French governor of Corsica he got an education first at the military school of Brienne and then at the military school of Paris, from which he passed into the artillery in 1785. He was an industrious student both of mathematics and history, his memory was prodigiously good,

and he made copious note-books which still exist. These note-books show no very exceptional intelligence, and they contain short pieces of original composition—upon suicide and similar adolescent topics. He fell early under the spell of Rousseau; he developed sensibility and a scorn for the corruptions of civilization. In 1786 he wrote a pamphlet against a Swiss pastor who had attacked Rousseau. He dreamt of an independent Corsica, freed from the French. With the Revolution he became an ardent republican and a supporter of the new French regime in Corsica. For some years, until the fall of Robespierre, he remained a Jacobin.

## § 2

*Bonaparte as a Republican General.*

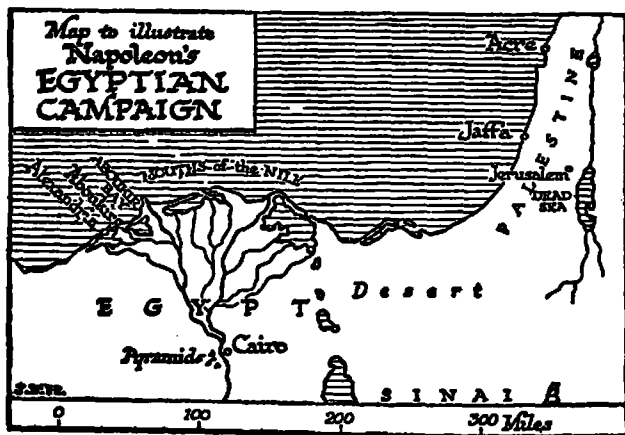
He soon gained the reputation of a useful and capable officer, and it was through Robespierre's younger brother that he got his first chance of distinction at Toulon. Toulon had been handed over to the British and Spanish by the royalists, and an allied fleet occupied its harbour. Bonaparte was given the command of the artillery, and under his direction the French forced the allies to abandon the port and town.

He was next appointed commander of the artillery in Italy, but he had not taken up his duties when the death of Robespierre seemed likely to involve his own; he was put under arrest as a Jacobin, and for a time he was in danger of the guillotine. That danger passed. He was employed as artillery commander in an abortive raid upon Corsica, and then went to Paris (1795) rather down at heel. Madame Junot in her *Memoirs* describes his lean face and slovenly appearance at this time, "his ill-combed, ill-powdered hair hanging down over his grey overcoat," his gloveless hands and badly blacked boots. It was a time of exhaustion and reaction after the severities of the Jacobite republic. "In Paris," says Holland Rose, "the star of Liberty was paling before Mercury, Mars, and Venus"—finance, uniforms, and social charm. The best of the common men were in the armies, away beyond the frontiers. We have already noted the last rising of the royalists in this year (1795). Napoleon had the luck to be in Paris, and found his second opportunity in this affair. He saved the Republic—of the Directory.

His abilities greatly impressed Carnot, the most upright of the Directors. Moreover, he married a charming young widow, Madame Josephine de Beauharnais, who had great influence

with Barras. Both these things probably helped him to secure the command in Italy.

We have no space here for the story of his brilliant campaigns in Italy (1796-97), but of the spirit in which that invasion of Italy was conducted we must say a word or two, because it illustrates so vividly the double soul of France and of Napoleon, and how revolutionary idealism was paling before practical urgencies. He proclaimed to the Italians that the French were coming to break their chains—and *they were!* He wrote to the Directory: "We will levy 20,000,000 francs in exactions in this country; it is one of the richest in the world." To his soldiers



he said, "You are famished and nearly naked. . . . I lead you into the most fertile plain in the world. There you will find great towns, rich provinces, honour, glory, riches. . . ."

We are all such mixed stuff as this; but these passages, written by a young man of twenty-seven, seem to show the gilt of honourable idealism rubbed off at an unusually early age.

His successes in Italy were brilliant and complete. He had wanted to go into Italy because there lay the most attractive task; he had risked his position in the army by refusing to take up the irksome duties of a command against the rebels in La Vendée. He had been a great reader of Plutarch's *Lives* and of Roman history, and his extremely active imagination was now busy with dreams of a revival of the eastern conquests of the Roman Empire. He got the republic of Venice out of his way by cutting it up between the French and Austria, securing the Ionian Islands and the Venetian fleet for France. This

peace, the Peace of Campo Formio, proved a bad bargain for both sides. The new republic of France assisted in the murder of an ancient republic—Napoleon carried his point against a considerable outcry in France—and Austria got Venetia, in which land in 1918 she was destined to bleed to death. There were also secret clauses by which both France and Austria were later to acquire south German territory. And it was not only the Roman push eastward that was now exciting Napoleon's brain. This was the land of Cæsar—and Cæsar was a bad example for the successful general of a not very stable republic.

Cæsar had come back to Rome from Gaul a hero and conqueror. His imitator would come back from Egypt and India—Egypt and India were to be his Gaul. The elements of failure stared him in the face. The way to Egypt and India was by sea, and the British, in spite of two recent naval mutinies, were stronger than the French at sea. Moreover, Egypt was a part of the Turkish Empire, by no means a contemptible power in those days. Nevertheless, he persuaded the Directory, which was dazzled by his Italian exploits, to let him go. An Armada started from Toulon in May, 1798, captured Malta, and had the good luck to evade the British fleet and arrive at Alexandria. He landed his troops hurriedly, and the Battle of the Pyramids made him master of Egypt.

The main British fleet at that time was in the Atlantic outside Cadiz, but the admiral had detached a force of his best ships, under Vice-Admiral Nelson—as great a genius in naval affairs as was Napoleon in things military—to chase and engage the French flotilla. For a time Nelson sought the French fleet in vain; finally, on the evening of the 1st of August, he found it at anchor in Aboukir Bay. He had caught it unawares; many of the men were ashore and a council was being held in the flagship. He had no charts, and it was a hazardous thing to sail into the shallow water in a bad light. The French admiral concluded, therefore, that his adversary would not attack before morning, and so made no haste in recalling his men aboard until it was too late to do so. Nelson, however, struck at once—against the advice of some of his captains. One ship only went aground. She marked the shoal for the rest of the fleet. He sailed to the attack in a double line about sundown, putting the French between two fires. Night fell as the battle was joined; the fight thundered and crashed in the darkness, until it was lit presently by the flames of burning French ships, and then by the flare of the French flagship, the *Orient*, blowing up. . . . Before midnight the Battle of the Nile was over, and

Napoleon's fleet was destroyed. Napoleon was cut off from France.

Says Holland Rose, quoting Thiers, this Egyptian expedition was "the rashest attempt history records." Napoleon was left in Egypt with the Turks gathering against him and his army infected with the plague. Nevertheless, he went on for a time with this Eastern scheme. He gained a victory at Jaffa, and, being short of provisions, *massacred all his prisoners*. Then he tried to take Acre, where his own siege artillery, just captured at sea by the British, was used against him. Returning baffled to Egypt, he gained a brilliant victory over a Turkish force at Aboukir, and then, deserting the army of Egypt—it held on till 1801, when it capitulated to a British force—made his escape back to France (1799), narrowly missing capture by a British cruiser off Sicily.

Here was failure enough to discredit any general—had it been known. But the very British cruisers which came so near to catching him helped him by preventing any real understanding of the Egyptian situation from reaching the French people. He could make a great flourish over the Battle of Aboukir and conceal the loss of Acre. Things were not going well with France just then. There had been military failures at several points; much of Italy had been lost, Bonaparte's Italy, and this turned men's minds to him as the natural saviour of that situation; moreover, there had been much peculation, and some of it was coming to light. France was in one of her phases of financial scandal, and Napoleon had not filched; the public was in that state of moral fatigue when a strong and honest man is called for, a wonderful, impossible healing man who will do everything for everybody. People persuaded themselves that this specious young man with the hard face, so providentially back from Egypt, was the strong and honest man required—another Washington.

With Julius Cæsar rather than Washington at the back of his mind, Napoleon responded to the demand of his time. A conspiracy was carefully engineered to replace the Directory by three "Consuls"—everybody seems to have been reading far too much Roman history just then—of whom Napoleon was to be the chief. The working of that conspiracy is too intricate a story for our space: it involved a Cromwell-like dispersal of the Lower House (the Council of Five Hundred), and in this affair Napoleon lost his nerve. The deputies shouted at him and hustled him, and he seems to have been frightened. He nearly fainted, stuttered, and could say nothing, but the situation

was saved by his brother Lucien, who brought in the soldiers and dispersed the council. This little hitch did not affect the final success of the scheme. The three Consuls were installed at the Luxembourg Palace, with two commissioners, to reconstruct the constitution.

With all his confidence restored, and sure of the support of the people, Napoleon took a high hand with his colleagues and the commissioners. A constitution was produced in which the chief executive officer was to be called the First Consul, with enormous powers. He was to be Napoleon; this was part of the constitution. He was to be re-elected or replaced at the end of ten years. He was to be assisted by a Council of State, appointed by himself, which was to initiate legislation and send its proposals to two bodies, the Legislative Body (which could vote but not discuss) and the Tribune (which could discuss but not vote), which were *selected* by an appointed Senate from a special class, the "notabilities of France," who were elected by the "notabilities of the departments," who were elected by the "notabilities of the commune," who were elected by the common voters. The suffrage for the election of the notabilities of the commune was universal. This was the sole vestige of democracy in the astounding pyramid.

This constitution was chiefly the joint production of a worthy philosopher, Siéyès, who was one of the three Consuls, and Bonaparte. But so weary was France with her troubles and efforts, and so confident were men in the virtue and ability of this man of destiny, that when, at the birth of the nineteenth century, this constitution was submitted to the country, it was carried by 3,011,007 votes to 1,562. France put herself absolutely in Bonaparte's hands, and prepared to be peaceful, happy, and glorious.

### § 3

#### *Napoleon First Consul, 1799-1804.*

Now surely here was opportunity such as never came to man before. Here was a position in which a man might well bow himself in fear of himself, and search his heart, and serve God and man to the utmost. The old order of things was dead or dying; strange new forces drove through the world seeking form and direction; the promise of a world republic and an enduring world peace whispered in a multitude of startled minds. France was in his hand, his instrument, to do with as he pleased, willing for peace, but tempered for war like an exquisite sword.

There lacked nothing to this great occasion but a noble imagination. Failing that, Napoleon could do no more than strut upon the crest of this great mountain of opportunity like a cockerel on a dunghill. The figure he makes in history is one of almost incredible self-conceit, of callous contempt and disregard of all who trusted him, and of a grandiose aping of Cæsar, Alexander, and Charlemagne which would be purely comic if it were not caked over with human blood. Until, as Victor Hugo said in his tremendous way, "God was bored by him," and he was kicked aside into a corner to end his days, explaining and explaining how very clever his worst blunders had been, prowling about his dismal hot island shooting birds and squabbling meanly with an underbred jailer who failed to show him proper "respect."

His career as First Consul was perhaps the least dishonourable phase in his career. He took the crumbling military affairs of the Directory in hand, and after a complicated campaign in North Italy brought matters to a head in the victory of Marengo, near Alessandria (1800). It was a victory that at some moments came very near disaster. In the December of the same year General Moreau, in the midst of snow, mud, and altogether abominable weather, inflicted an overwhelming defeat upon the Austrian army at Hohenlinden. If Napoleon had gained this battle, it would have counted among his most characteristic and brilliant exploits. These things made the hoped-for peace possible. In 1801 the preliminaries of peace with England and Austria were signed. Peace with England, the Treaty of Amiens, was concluded in 1802, and Napoleon was free to give himself to the creative statecraft of which France, and Europe through France, stood in need. The war had given the country extended boundaries, the treaty with England restored the colonial empire of France and left her in a position of security beyond the utmost dreams of Louis XIV. It was open to Napoleon to work out and consolidate the new order of things, to make a modern State that should become a beacon and inspiration to Europe and all the world.

He attempted nothing of the sort. His little, imitative imagination was full of the dream of being Cæsar over again. He was scheming to make himself a real emperor, with a crown upon his head and all his rivals and school-fellows and friends at his feet. This could give him no fresh power that he did not already exercise, but it would be more splendid—it would astonish his mother. What response was there in a head of that sort for the splendid creative challenge of the time?

But first France must be prosperous. France hungry would



certainly not endure an emperor. He set himself to carry out an old scheme of roads that Louis XV had approved; he developed canals in imitation of the English canals; he reorganized the police and made the country safe; and, preparing the scene for his personal drama, he set himself to make Paris look like Rome, with classical arches, with classical columns. Admirable schemes for banking development were available, and he made use of them. In all these things he moved with the times; they would

have happened—with less auto-  
cracy, with less centralization—  
if he had never been born. And  
he set himself to weaken the  
republicans whose fundamental  
convictions he was planning  
to outrage. He recalled the  
*émigrés*, provided they gave  
satisfactory assurances to re-  
spect the new regime. Many  
were very willing to come back  
on such terms, and let Bourbons  
be by-gones. And he worked  
out a great reconciliation, a  
Concordat, with Rome. Rome  
was to support him, and he  
was to restore the authority



Napoleon as Emperor

of Rome in the parishes. France would never be obedient and manageable, he thought, she would never stand a new monarchy, without religion. "How can you have order in a state," he said, "without religion? Society cannot exist without inequality of fortunes, which cannot endure apart from religion. When one man is dying of hunger near another who is ill of surfeit, he cannot resign himself to this difference unless there is an authority which declares—'God wills it thus: there must be poor and rich in the world: but hereafter and during all eternity the division of things will take place differently.'" Religion—and especially of the later Roman brand—was, he thought, excellent stuff for keeping the common people quiet. In his early Jacobin days he had denounced it for that very reason.

Another great achievement which marks his imaginative scope and his estimate of human nature was the institution of the Legion of Honour, a scheme for decorating Frenchmen with bits of ribbon which was admirably calculated to divert ambitious men from subversive proceedings.

And, also, Napoleon interested himself in Christian propaganda. Here is the Napoleonic view of the political uses of Christ, a view that has tainted all French missions from that time forth. "It is my wish to re-establish the institution for foreign missions; for the religious missionaries may be very useful to me in Asia, Africa, and America, as I shall make them reconnoitre all the lands they visit. The sanctity of their dress will not only protect them but serve to conceal their political and commercial investigations. The head of the missionary establishment shall reside no longer at Rome, but in Paris."

These are the ideas of a roguish merchant rather than a statesman. His treatment of education shows the same blindness to the realities of the dawn about him. Elementary education he neglected almost completely; he left it to the conscience of the local authorities, and he provided that the teachers should be paid out of the fees of the scholars; it is clear he did not want the common people to be educated; he had no glimmering of any understanding why they should be; but he interested himself in the provision of technical and higher schools because his State needed the services of clever, self-seeking, well-informed men. This was an astounding retrogression from the great scheme, drafted by Condorcet for the Republic in 1792, for a complete system of free education for the entire nation. Slowly but steadfastly the project of Condorcet comes true; the great nations of the world are being compelled to bring it nearer and nearer to realization, and the devices of Napoleon pass out of our interest. As for the education of the mothers and wives of our race, this was the quality of Napoleon's wisdom: "I do not think that we need trouble ourselves with any plan of instruction for young females; they cannot be better brought up than by their mothers. Public education is not suitable for them, because they are never called upon to act in public. Manners are all in all to them, and marriage is all they look to."

The First Consul was no kinder to women in the *Code Napoléon*. A wife, for example, had no control over her own property; she was in her husband's hands. This code was the work very largely of the Council of State. Napoleon seems rather to have hindered than helped its deliberations. He would invade the session without notice, and favour its members with lengthy monologues, frequently quite irrelevant to the matter in hand. The Council listened with profound respect; it was all the Council could do. He would keep his councillors up to unearthly hours, and betray a simple pride in his superior wakefulness. He recalled these discussions with peculiar satisfaction in his

later years, and remarked on one occasion that his glory consisted not in having won forty battles, but in having created the *Code Napoléon*. . . . So far as it substituted plain statements for inaccessible legal mysteries his *Code* was a good thing; it gathered together, revised and made clear a vast disorderly accumulation of laws old and new. Like all his constructive work, it made for immediate efficiency, it defined things and relations so that men could get to work upon them without further discussion. It was of less immediate practical importance that it frequently defined them wrongly. There was no intellectual power, as distinguished from intellectual energy, behind this codification. It took everything that existed for granted: ("Sa Majesté ne croit que ce qui est."<sup>1</sup>) The fundamental ideas of the civilized community and of the terms of human co-operation were in process of reconstruction all about Napoleon—and he never perceived it. He accepted a phase of change, and tried to fix it for ever. To this day France is cramped by this early nineteenth-century strait-waistcoat into which he clapped her. He fixed the status of women, the status of labourers, the status of the peasant, they all struggle to this day in the net of his hard definitions.

So briskly and forcibly Napoleon set his mind, hard, clear and narrow, to brace up France. That bracing up was only a part of the larger schemes that dominated him. His imagination was set upon a new Cæsarism. In 1802 he got himself made First Consul for life with the power of appointing a successor, and his clear intention of annexing Holland and Italy, in spite of his treaty obligations to keep them separate, made the Peace of Amiens totter crazily from the very beginning. Since his schemes were bound to provoke a war with England, he should have waited, at any cost, until he had brought his navy to a superiority over the British navy. He had the control of great resources for shipbuilding, the British government was a weak one, and three or four years would have sufficed to shift that balance. But, in spite of his rough experiences in Egypt, he had never mastered the importance of sea power. In 1803 his occupation of Switzerland precipitated a crisis, and war broke out again with England. The weak Addington in England gave place to the greater Pitt. The rest of Napoleon's story turns upon that war.

During the period of the Consulate the First Consul was very active in advancing the fortunes of his brothers and sisters. This was quite human, very clannish and Corsican, and it helps

<sup>1</sup> Gourgaud, quoted by Holland Rose.

us to understand just how he valued his position and the opportunities before him. A large factor in the making of Napoleon was the desire to amaze, astonish, and subdue the minds of the Bonaparte family, and their neighbours. He promoted his brothers ridiculously—for they were the most ordinary of men. But one person who knew him well was neither amazed nor subdued. This was his mother. He sent her money to spend and astonish the neighbours; he exhorted her to make a display, to live as became the mother of so marvellous, so world-shaking a son.

But the good lady, who had birched the Man of Destiny at the age of sixteen for grimacing at his grandmother, was neither dazzled nor deceived by him at the age of thirty-two. All France might worship him, but she had no illusions. She put by the money he sent her; she continued her customary economies. "When it is all over," she said, "you will be glad of my savings."

#### § 4

#### *Napoleon I, Emperor, 1804-14.*

We will not detail the steps by which Napoleon became Emperor. His coronation was the most extraordinary revival that it is possible to imagine. Cæsar was no longer the model; Napoleon was now Charlemagne. He was crowned emperor, not indeed at Rome, but in the cathedral of Notre Dame in Paris; the Pope (Pius VII) had been brought from Rome to perform the ceremony; and at the climax Napoleon I seized the crown, waved the Pope aside, and crowned himself. The injunction of Charlemagne to Louis had at last borne fruit. In 1806 Napoleon revived another venerable antiquity, and, still following the footsteps of Charlemagne, crowned himself with the iron crown of Lombardy in the cathedral of Milan.

The four daughter republics of France were now to become kingdoms: in 1806 he set up brother Louis in Holland and brother Joseph in Naples. But the story of the subordinate kingdoms he created in Europe, helpful though this free handling of frontiers was towards the subsequent unification of Italy and Germany, is too complex and evanescent for this *Outline*.

The pact between the new Charlemagne and the new Leo did not hold good for very long. In 1807 he began to bully the Pope, and in 1811 he made him a close prisoner at Fontainebleau. There does not seem to have been much reason in these proceedings. They estranged Catholic opinion, as his coronation

had estranged liberal opinion. He ceased to stand either for the old or the new. The new he had betrayed; the old he had failed to win. He stood at last for nothing but himself.

There seems to have been as little reason in the foreign policy that now plunged Europe into a fresh cycle of wars. Having quarrelled with Great Britain too soon, he (1804) assembled a vast army at Boulogne for the conquest of England, regardless of the naval situation. He even struck a medal and erected a column at Boulogne to commemorate the triumph of his projected invasion. In some "Napoleonic" fashion the British fleet was to be decoyed away, this army of Boulogne was to be smuggled across the Channel on a flotilla of rafts and boats, and London was to be captured before the fleet returned. At the same time his aggressions in south Germany forced Austria and Russia steadily into a coalition with Britain against him. In 1805 two fatal blows at any hope he may have entertained of ultimate victory were struck by the British admirals Calder and Nelson. In July the former inflicted a serious reverse upon the French fleet in the Bay of Biscay; in October the latter destroyed the joint fleets of France and Spain at the Battle of Trafalgar. Nelson died splendidly upon the *Victory*, victorious. Thereafter Napoleon was left with Britain in pitiless opposition, unattainable and unconquerable, able to strike here or there against him along all the coasts of Europe.

For some years the mortal wound of Trafalgar was hidden from the French mind altogether. They heard merely that "storms have caused us to lose some ships of the line after an imprudent fight." After Calder's victory, Napoleon snatched his army from Boulogne, rushed it across Europe, and defeated the Austrians at Ulm and Austerlitz. Under these inauspicious circumstances Prussia came into the war against him, and was utterly defeated and broken at the Battle of Jena (1806). Although Austria and Prussia were broken, Russia was still a fighting power, and the next year was devoted to this tougher and less accessible antagonist. We cannot trace in any detail the difficulties of the Polish campaign against Russia; Napoleon was roughly handled at Pultusk—which he announced in Paris as a brilliant victory—and again at Eylau. Then the Russians were defeated at Friedland (1807). As yet he had never touched Russian soil, the Russians were still as unbeaten as the British; but now came an extraordinary piece of good fortune for Napoleon. By a mixture of boasting, subtlety and flattery he won over the young and ambitious Tsar Alexander I—he was just thirty years old—to an alliance. The two emperors met on a

raft in the middle of the Niemen at Tilsit, and there came to an understanding.

Alexander had imbibed much liberalism during his education at the Court of Catherine II, and was all for freedom, education, and the new order of the world—subject to his own pre-eminence. "He would gladly have everyone free," said one of his early associates, "provided that everyone was prepared to do freely exactly what he wished." And he declared that he would have abolished serfdom if it had cost him his head—if only civilization had been more advanced. He made war against France, he said, because Napoleon was a tyrant, to free the French people. After Friedland he saw Napoleon in a different light. These two men met eleven days after that rout—Alexander no doubt in the state of explanatory exaltation natural to his type during a mood of change.

To Napoleon the meeting must have been extremely gratifying. This was his first meeting with an emperor upon terms of equality. Two imaginations soared together upon the raft at Tilsit. "What is Europe?" said Alexander. "We are Europe." They discussed the affairs of Prussia and Austria in that spirit, they divided Turkey in anticipation, they arranged for the conquest of India, and, indeed, of most of Asia, and that Russia should take Finland from the Swedes; and they disregarded the disagreeable fact that the greater part of the world's surface is sea, and that on the seas the British fleets sailed now unchallenged. Close at hand was Poland, ready to rise up and become the passionate ally of France had Napoleon but willed it so. But he was blind to Poland. It was a day of visions without vision. Napoleon even then, it seems, concealed the daring thought that he might one day marry a Russian princess, a real princess. But that, he was to learn in 1810, was going a little too far.

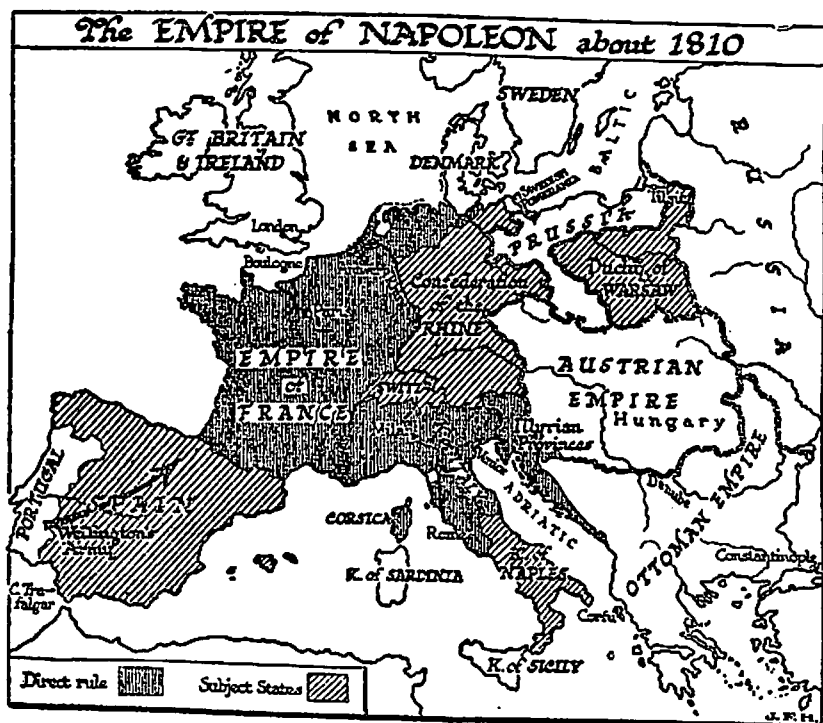
After Tilsit there was a perceptible deterioration in Napoleon's quality; he became rasher, less patient of obstacles, more and more the fated master of the world, more and more intolerable to everyone he encountered.

In 1808 he committed a very serious blunder. Spain was



Tsar Alexander I.

his abject ally, completely under his control, but he saw fit to depose its Bourbon king in order to promote his brother Joseph from the crown of the two Sicilies. Portugal he had already conquered, and the two kingdoms of Spain and Portugal were to be united. Thereupon the Spanish arose in a state of patriotic fury, surrounded a French army at Baylen, and compelled it



to surrender. It was an astonishing break in the French career of victory.

The British were not slow to seize the foothold this insurrection gave them. A British army under Sir Arthur Wellesley (afterwards the Duke of Wellington) landed in Portugal, defeated the French at Vimiero, and compelled them to retire into Spain. The news of these reverses caused a very great excitement in Germany and Austria, and the Tsar assumed a more arrogant attitude towards his ally.

There was another meeting of these two potentates at Erfurt, in which the Tsar was manifestly less amenable to the dazzling tactics of Napoleon than he had been. Followed four years of

unstable "ascendancy" for France, while the outlines on the map of Europe waved about like garments on a clothes-line on a windy day. Napoleon's personal empire grew by frank annexations to include Holland, much of Western Germany, much of Italy, and much of the eastern Adriatic coast. But one by one the French colonies were falling to the British, and the British armies in the Spanish peninsula, with the Spanish auxiliaries, slowly pressed the French northwards. All Europe was getting very weary of Napoleon; his antagonists now were no longer merely monarchs and ministers, but whole peoples also. The Prussians, after the disaster of Jena in 1806, had set to work to put their house in order. Under the leadership of Freiherr von Stein they had swept aside their feudalism, abolished privilege and serfdom, organized popular education and popular patriotism, accomplished, in fact, without any internal struggle, nearly everything that France had achieved in 1789. By 1810 a new Prussia existed, the nucleus of a new Germany. And now Alexander, inspired, it would seem, by dreams of world ascendancy, was posing again as the friend of liberty. In 1810 fresh friction was created by Alexander's objection to Napoleon's matrimonial ambitions. For Napoleon was now divorcing his old helper Josephine, because she was childless, in order to secure the "continuity" of his "dynasty." Napoleon, thwarted of a Russian princess, snubbed, indeed, by Alexander, turned to Austria and married the archduchess Marie Louise. The Austrian statesmen read him aright. They were very ready to throw him their princess. By that marriage Napoleon was captured for the dynastic system. He might have been the maker of a new world, he preferred to be the son-in-law of the old.

In the next two years his affairs crumbled apace. He was no longer the leader and complement of the Revolution; no longer the embodied spirit of a world reborn; he was just a new and rawer sort of autocrat. He had estranged all free-spirited men, and he had antagonized the church. Kings and Jacobins were at one when it came to the question of his overthrow. Britain was now his inveterate enemy; Spain was blazing with a spirit that a Corsican should have understood; it needed only a breach with Alexander I to set this empire of bluff and stage scenery swaying towards its downfall. The quarrel came. Alexander's feelings for Napoleon had always been of a very mixed sort; he envied Napoleon as a rival and despised him as an upstart. Moreover, there was a kind of vague and sentimental greatness about Alexander; he was given to mystical religiosity,

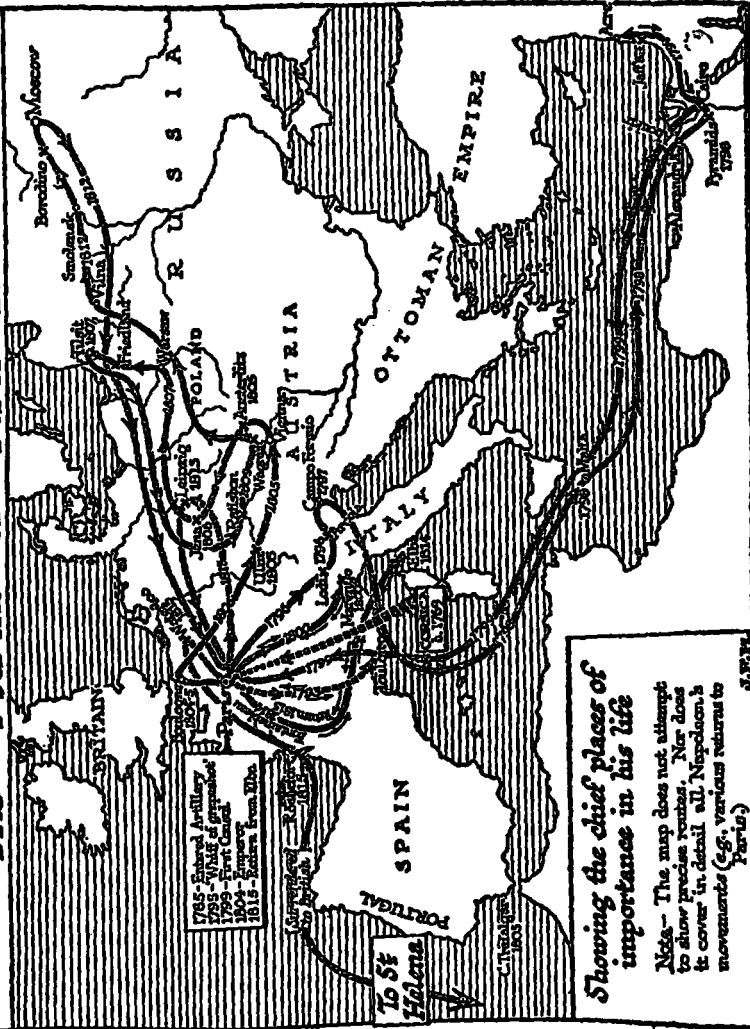


he had the conception of a mission for Russia and himself to bring peace to Europe and the world—by destroying Napoleon. But bringing peace to Europe seemed to him quite compatible with the annexation of Finland, of most of Poland, and of great portions of the Turkish Empire. And particularly he wanted to resume trading with Britain, against which Napoleon had set his face. For all the trade of Germany had been dislocated and the mercantile classes embittered by the Napoleonic "Continental System," which was to ruin Britain by excluding British goods from every country in Europe. Russia had suffered even more than Germany.

The breach came in 1811, when Alexander withdrew from the "Continental System." In 1812 a great mass of armies, amounting altogether to 600,000 men, began to move towards Russia under the supreme command of the new emperor. About half this force was French; the rest was drawn from the French allies and subject peoples. It was a conglomerate army like the army of Darius or the army of Kavadh. The Spanish war was still going on; Napoleon made no attempt to end it. Altogether, it drained away a quarter of a million men from France. He fought his way across Poland and Russia to Moscow before the winter—for the most part the Russian armies declined battle—and even before the winter closed in upon him his position became manifestly dangerous. He took Moscow, expecting that this would oblige Alexander to make peace. Alexander would not make peace, and Napoleon found himself in much the same position as Darius had been in, 2,300 years before, in south Russia. The Russians, still unconquered in a decisive battle, raided his communications, wasted his army—disease helping them; even before Napoleon reached Moscow 150,000 men had been lost. But he lacked the wisdom of Darius, and would not retreat. The winter remained mild for an unusually long time—he could have escaped; but, instead, he remained in Moscow, making impossible plans. He had been marvellously lucky in all his previous gambles with fate; he had escaped undeservedly from Egypt, he had been saved from destruction in Britain by the British naval victories; but now he was in the net again, and this time he was not to escape. Perhaps he would have wintered in Moscow, but the Russians smoked him out; they set fire to and burnt most of the city.

It was late in October, too late altogether, before he decided to return. He made an ineffectual attempt to break through to a fresh line of retreat to the south-west, and then turned the faces of the survivors of his Grand Army towards the country

# The Trail of Napoleon



they had devastated in their advance. Immense distances separated them from any friendly territory. The winter was in no hurry. For a week the Grand Army struggled through mud; then came sharp frosts, and then the first flakes of snow, and then snow and snow. . . .

Slowly discipline dissolved. The hungry army spread itself out in search of supplies until it broke up into mere bands of marauders. The peasants, if only in self-defence, rose against them, waylaid them, and murdered them; a cloud of light cavalry—Scythians still—hunted them down. That retreat is one of the great tragedies of history.

At last Napoleon and his staff and a handful of guards and attendants reappeared in Germany, bringing no army with him, followed only by straggling and demoralized bands. The Grand Army, retreating under Murat, reached Königsberg in a disciplined state, but only about a thousand strong out of six hundred thousand. From Königsberg Murat fell back to Posen. The Prussian contingent had surrendered to the Russians; the Austrians had gone homeward to the south. Everywhere scattered fugitives, ragged, lean, and frost-bitten, spread the news of the disaster.

Napoleon's magic was nearly exhausted. He fled post-haste to Paris. He began to order new levies and gather fresh armies amidst the wreckage of his world empire. Austria turned against him (1813); all Europe was eager to rise against this defaulting trustee of freedom, this mere usurper. He had betrayed the new order; the old order he had saved and revived now destroyed him. Prussia rose, and the German "War of Liberation" began. Sweden joined his enemies. Later, Holland revolted. Murat had rallied about 14,000 Frenchmen round his disciplined nucleus in Posen, and this force retreated through Germany, as a man might retreat who had ventured into a cageful of drugged lions and found that the effects of the drug were evaporating. Napoleon, with fresh forces, took up the chief command in the spring, won a great battle at Dresden, and then for a time he seems to have gone to pieces intellectually and morally. He became insanely irritable, with moods of inaction. He did little or nothing to follow up the Battle of Dresden. In September the "Battle of the Nations" was fought round and about Leipzig, after which the Saxons, who had hitherto followed his star, went over to the Allies. The end of the year saw the French beaten back into France.

1814 was the closing campaign. France was invaded from the east and the south. Swedes, Germans, Austrians, Russians,

crossed the Rhine; British and Spanish came through the Pyrenees. Once more Napoleon fought brilliantly, but now he fought ineffectually. The eastern armies did not so much defeat him as push past him, and Paris capitulated in March. A little later at Fontainebleau the emperor abdicated.

In Provence, on his way out of the country, his life was endangered by a royalist mob.

## § 5

*The Hundred Days.*

This was the natural and proper end of Napoleon's career. At last he was suppressed. And had there been any real wisdom in the conduct of human affairs, we should now have to tell of the concentration of human science and will upon the task his career had interrupted, the task of building up a world-system of justice and free effort in the place of the bankrupt ancient order. But we have to tell of nothing of the sort. Science and wisdom were conspicuously absent from the great council of the Allies. Came the vague humanitarianism and dreamy vanity of the Tsar Alexander, came the shaken Habsburgs of Austria, the resentful Hohenzollerns of Prussia, the aristocratic traditions of Britain, still badly frightened by the Revolution and its conscience all awry with stolen commons and sweated factory children. No peoples came to the Congress, but only monarchs and foreign ministers. The Congress had hardly assembled before the diplomatists set to work making secret bargains and treaties behind each other's backs. Nothing could exceed the pomp and splendour of the Congress which gathered at Vienna after a magnificent ceremonial visit of the allied sovereigns to London. The social side of the Congress was very strong; pretty ladies abounded, there was a galaxy of stars and uniforms, endless dinners and balls, a mighty flow of bright anecdotes and sparkling wit. The brightest spirit of the gathering was a certain Talleyrand, one of Napoleon's princes, a very brilliant man indeed, who had been a pre-revolutionary cleric, who had proposed the revolutionary confiscation of the church estates, and who was now for bringing back the Bourbons.

The Allies frittered away precious time in more and more rapacious disputes; the Bourbons returned to France. Back came all the remainder of the *émigrés* with them, eager for restitution and revenge. One great egotism had been swept aside—only to reveal a crowd of meaner egotists. The new king was the brother of Louis XVI; he had taken the title of Louis XVIII