

THE PEASANT STORY OF NAPOLEON



BY HONORE DE BALZAC



Goguelet, an old soldier who fought under Napoleon, tells the story of his wonderful General and Emperor to a group of eager listeners in the country doctor's barn.

You see, my friends, Napoleon was born in Corsica, a French island, warmed by the sun of Italy, where it is like a furnace, and where the people kill each other, from father to son, all about nothing: that's a way they have. To begin with the marvel of the thing—his mother, who was the handsomest woman of her time, and a knowing one, bethought herself of dedicating him to God, so that he might escape the dangers of his childhood and future life; for she had dreamed that the world was set on fire the day he was born. And, indeed, it was a prophecy! So she asked God to protect him, on condition that Napoleon should restore His holy religion, which was then cast to the ground. Well, that was agreed upon, and we shall see what came of it.

“Follow me closely, and tell me if what you hear is in the nature of man.

“Sure and certain it is that none but a man who conceived the idea of making a compact with God could have passed unhurt through the enemy's lines, through cannon-balls, and discharges of grape-shot that swept the rest of us off like flies, and always

respected his head. I had proof of that—I myself—at Eylau. I see him now, as he rode up a height, took his field-glass, looked at the battle, and said, ‘All goes well.’ One of those plumed busybodies, who plagued him considerably and followed him everywhere, even to his meals, so they said, thought to play the wag, and took the Emperor's place as he rode away. Ho! In a twinkling, head and plume were off! You must understand that Napoleon had promised to keep the secret of his compact all to himself. That's why all those who followed him, even his nearest friends, fell like nuts—Duroc, Bessieres, Lannes—all strong as steel bars, though he could bend them as he pleased. Besides—to prove he was the child of God, and made to be the father of soldiers—was he ever known to be lieutenant or captain? No, no; commander-in-chief from the start. He didn't look to be more than twenty-four years of age when he was an old general at the taking of Toulon, where he first began to show the others that they knew nothing about manoeuvring cannon.

“After that, down came our slip of a general to command the grand army of Italy, which hadn't bread, nor munitions, nor shoes, nor coats—a poor army, as naked as a worm. ‘My friends,’ said he, ‘here we are together. Get it into your pates that fifteen

days from now you will be conquerors—new clothes, good gaiters, famous shoes, and every man with a great-coat; but, my children, to get these things you must march to Milan, where they are.’ And we marched. France, crushed as flat as a bed-bug, straightened up. We were thirty thousand bare-feet against eighty thousand Austrian bullies, all fine men, well set-up. I see ‘em now! But Napoleon—he was then only Bonaparte—he knew how to put the courage into us! We marched by night, and we marched by day; we slapped their faces at Montenotte, we thrashed them at Rivoli, Lodi, Arcole, Millesimo, and we never let ‘em up. A soldier gets the taste of conquest. So Napoleon whirled round those Austrian generals, who didn’t know where to poke themselves to get out of his way, and he pelted ‘em well—nipped off ten thousand men at a blow sometimes, by getting round them with fifteen hundred Frenchmen, and then he gleaned as he pleased. He took their cannon, their supplies, their money, their munitions, in short, all they had that was good to take. He fought them and beat them on the mountains, he drove them into the rivers and seas, he bit ‘em in the air, he devoured ‘em on the ground, and he lashed ‘em everywhere. Hey! The grand army feathered itself well; for, d’ye see the Emperor, who was a wit, called up the inhabitants and told them he was there to deliver them. So after that the natives lodged and cherished us; the women too, and very judicious they were.

Now here’s the end of it. In Ventose, ‘96—in those times that was the month of March of to-day—we lay cuddled in a corner of Savoie with the marmots; and yet, before that campaign was over, we were masters of Italy, just as Napoleon had predicted; and by the following March—in a single year and two campaigns—he had brought us within sight of Vienna. ‘Twas a clean sweep. We devoured their armies, one after the other, and made an end of four Austrian generals. One old fellow, with white hair, was roasted like a rat in the straw at Mantua. Kings begged for mercy on their knees! Peace was won.

“Could a man have done that? No; God helped him, to a certainty!

“He divided himself up like the loaves in the Gospel, commanded the battle by day, planned it by night; going and coming, for the sentinels saw him—never eating, never sleeping. So, seeing these prodigies, the soldiers adopted him for their father. Forward, march! Then those others, the rulers in Paris, seeing this, said to themselves: ‘Here’s a bold one that seems to get his orders from the skies; he’s likely to put his paw on France. We must let him loose on Asia; we will send him to America, perhaps that will satisfy him.’ But ‘t was written above for him, as it was for Jesus Christ. The command went forth that he should go to Egypt. See, again, his resemblance to the Son of God. But that’s not all. He called together his best veterans, his fire-eaters, the ones he had particularly put the

devil into, and he said to them like this: ‘My friends, they have given us Egypt to chew up, just to keep us busy, but we’ll swallow it whole in a couple of campaigns, as we did Italy. The common soldiers shall be princes and have the land for their own. Forward, march!’ ‘Forward, march!’ cried the sergeants, and there we were at Toulon, road to Egypt. At that time the English had all their ships in the sea; but when we embarked, Napoleon said: ‘They won’t see us. It is just as well that you should know from this time forth that your general has got his star in the sky, which guides and protects us.’ What was said was done. Passing over the sea, we took Malta like an orange, just to quench his thirst for victory; for he was a man who couldn’t live and do nothing.

“So here we are in Egypt. Good. Once here, other orders. The Egyptians, d’ye see, are men who, ever since the earth was, have had giants for sovereigns, and armies as numerous as ants; for, you must understand, that’s the land of genii and crocodiles, where they’ve built pyramids as big as our mountains, and buried their kings under them to keep them fresh—an idea that pleased ‘em mightily. So then, after we disembarked, the Little Corporal said to us: ‘My children, the country you are going to conquer has a lot of gods that you must respect; because Frenchmen ought to be friends with everybody, and fight the nations without vexing the inhabitants. Get it into your skulls that you

are not to touch anything at first, for it is all going to be yours soon. Forward, march!’ So far, so good. But all those people of Africa, to whom Napoleon was foretold under the name of Kébir-Bonaberdis—a word of their lingo that means ‘the sultan fires’—were afraid as the devil of him. So the Grand Turk, and Asia, and Africa had recourse to magic. They sent us a demon, named the Mahdi, supposed to have descended from heaven on a white horse, which, like its master, was bullet-proof; and both of them lived on air, without food to support them. There are some that say they saw them; but I can’t give you any reasons to make you certain about that. The rulers of Arabia and the Mamelukes tried to make their troopers believe that the Mahdi could keep them from perishing in battle; and they pretended he was an angel sent from heaven to fight Napoleon and get back Solomon’s seal. Solomon’s seal was part of their paraphernalia which they vowed our general had stolen. You must understand that we’d given ‘em a good many wry faces, in spite of what he had said to us.

“Now, tell me how they knew that Napoleon had a pact with God? Was that natural, d’ye think?

“They held to it in their minds that Napoleon commanded the genii, and could pass hither and thither in the twinkling of an eye, like a bird. The fact is, he was everywhere. At last, it came to his carrying off a queen beautiful as the dawn, for whom he had of-

ferred all his treasure, and diamonds as big as pigeon's eggs—a bargain which the Mameluke to whom she particularly belonged positively refused, although he had several others. Such matters when they come to that pass, can't be settled without a great many battles; and, indeed, there was no scarcity of battles; there was fighting enough to please everybody. We were in line at Alexandria, at Gizeh, and before the Pyramids; we marched in the sun and through the sand, where some, who had the dazzles, saw water that they couldn't drink, and shade where their flesh was roasted. But we made short work of the Mamelukes; and everybody else yielded at the voice of Napoleon, who took possession of Upper and Lower Egypt, Arabia, and even the capitals of kingdoms that were no more, where there were thousands of statues and all the plagues of Egypt, more particularly lizards—a mammoth of a country where everybody could take his acres of land for as little as he pleased. Well, while Napoleon was busy with his affairs inland—where he had it in his head to do fine things—the English burned his fleet at Aboukir; for they were always looking about them to annoy us. But Napoleon, who had the respect of the East and of the West, whom the Pope called his son, and the cousin of Mohammed called 'his dear father,' resolved to punish England, and get hold of India in exchange for his fleet. He was just about to take us across the Red Sea into Asia, a country where there are

diamonds and gold to pay the soldiers and palaces for bivouacs, when the Mahdi made a treaty with the plague, and sent it down to hinder our victories. Halt! The army to a man defiled at that parade; and few they were who came back on their feet. Dying soldiers couldn't take Saint-Jean d'Acre, though they rushed at it three times with generous and martial obstinacy. The Plague was the strongest. No saying to that enemy, 'My good friend.' Every soldier lay ill. Napoleon alone was fresh as a rose, and the whole army saw him drinking in pestilence without its doing him a bit of harm.

"Ha! My friends! Will you tell me that that's in the nature of a mere man?"

"The Mamelukes, knowing we were all in the ambulances, thought they could stop the way; but that sort of joke wouldn't do with Napoleon. So he said to his demons, his veterans, those that had the toughest hide, 'Go, clear me the way.' Junot, a sabre of the first cut, and his particular friend, took a thousand men, no more, and ripped up the army of the pacha who had had the presumption to put himself in the way. After that, we came back to headquarters at Cairo. Now, here's another side of the story. Napoleon absent, France was letting herself be ruined by the rulers in Paris, who kept back the pay of the soldiers of the other armies, and their clothing, and their rations; left them to die of hunger, and expected them to lay down the law to the universe without taking any

trouble to help them. Idiots who amused themselves by chattering, instead of putting their own hands in the dough. Well, that's how it happened that our armies were beaten, and the frontiers of France were encroached upon: the man was not there. Now observe, I say man because that's what they called him; but 'twas nonsense, for he had a star and all its belongings; it was we who were only men. He taught history to France after his famous battle of Aboukir, where, without losing more than three hundred men, and with a single division, he vanquished the grand army of the Turk, seventy-five thousand strong, and hustled more than half of it into the sea, r-r-rah!

“That was his last thunder-clap in Egypt. He said to himself, seeing the way things were going in Paris, ‘I am the saviour of France; I know it, and I must go.’ But, understand me, the army didn't know he was going, or they'd have kept him by force and made him Emperor of the East. So now we were sad; for He was gone who was all our joy. He left the command to Kléber, a big mastiff, who came off duty at Cairo, assassinated by an Egyptian, whom they put to death by impaling him on a bayonet; that's the way they guillotine people down there. But it makes 'em suffer so much that a soldier had pity on the criminal and gave him his canteen; and then, as soon as the Egyptian had drunk his fill, he gave up the ghost with all the pleasure in life. But that's a trifle we

couldn't laugh at then. Napoleon embarked in a cockleshell, a little skiff that was nothing at all, though 'twas called ‘Fortune;’ and in a twinkling, under the nose of England, who was blockading him with ships of the line, frigates, and anything that could hoist a sail, he crossed over, and there he was in France. For he always had the power, mind you, of crossing the seas at one straddle.

“Was that a human man? Bah!

“So, one minute he is at Fréjus, the next in Paris. There, they all adore him; but he summons the government. ‘What have you done with my children, the soldiers?’ he says to the lawyers. ‘You're a mob of rascally scribblers; you are making France a mess of pottage, and snapping your fingers at what people think of you. It won't do; and I speak the opinion of everybody.’ So, on that, they wanted to battle with him and kill him—click! He had 'em locked up in barracks, or flying out of windows, or drafted among his followers, where they were as mute as fishes and as pliable as a quid of tobacco. After that stroke—consul! And then, as it was not for him to doubt the Supreme Being, he fulfilled his promise to the good God, who, you see, had kept His word to him. He gave Him back His churches, and reestablished His religion; the bells rang for God and for him: and lo! Everybody was pleased; primo, the priests, whom he saved from being harassed; secundo, the bourgeois, who thought only of their trade, and no longer had to fear the

rapiamus of the law, which had got to be unjust; tertio, the nobles, for he forbade they should be killed, as, unfortunately, the people had got the habit of doing.

“But he still had the Enemy to wipe out; and he wasn’t the man to go to sleep at a mess-table, because, d’ye see, his eye looked over the whole earth as if it were no bigger than a man’s head. So then he appeared in Italy, like as though he had stuck his head through the window. One glance was enough. The Austrians were swallowed up at Marengo like so many gudgeons by a whale! Ouf! The French eagles sang their pæans so loud that all the world heard them—and it sufficed! ‘We won’t play that game any more,’ said the German. ‘Enough, enough!’ said all the rest. To sum up: Europe backed down, England knocked under. General peace; and the kings and the peoples made believe kiss each other. That’s the time when the Emperor invented the Legion of Honour—and a fine thing, too. ‘In France’—this is what he said at Boulogne before the whole army—‘every man is brave. So the citizen who does a fine action shall be sister to the soldier, and the soldier shall be his brother, and the two shall be one under the flag of honour.’

“We, who were down in Egypt, now came home. All was changed! He left us general, and hey! In a twinkling we found him emperor. France gave herself to him, like a fine girl to a lancer. When it was done—to the satisfaction of all, as you may say—a

sacred ceremony took place, the like of which was never seen under the canopy of the skies. The Pope and the cardinals, in their red and gold vestments, crossed the Alps expressly to crown him before the army and the people, who clapped their hands. There is one thing that I should do very wrong not to tell you. In Egypt, in the desert close to Syria, the RED MAN came to him on the Mount of Moses, and said, ‘All is well.’ Then, at Marengo, the night before the victory, the same Red Man appeared before him for the second time, standing erect and saying: ‘Thou shalt see the world at thy feet; thou shalt be Emperor of France, King of Italy, master of Holland, sovereign of Spain, Portugal, and the Illyrian provinces, protector of Germany, saviour of Poland, first eagle of the Legion of Honour—all.’ This Red Man, you understand, was his genius, his spirit—a sort of satellite who served him, as some say, to communicate with his star. I never really believed that. But the Red Man himself is a true fact. Napoleon spoke of him, and said he came to him in troubled moments, and lived in the palace of the Tuileries under the roof. So, on the day of the coronation, Napoleon saw him for the third time; and they were in consultation over many things.

“After that, Napoleon went to Milan to be crowned king of Italy, and there the grand triumph of the soldier began. Every man who could write was made an officer. Down came pensions; it rained duchies; treasures poured

in for the staff which didn't cost France a penny; and the Legion of Honour provided incomes for the private soldiers—of which I receive mine to this day. So here were the armies maintained as never before on this earth. But besides that, the Emperor, knowing that he was to be the emperor of the whole world, bethought him of the bourgeois, and to please them he built fairy monuments, after their own ideas, in places where you'd never think to find any. For instance, suppose you were coming back from Spain and going to Berlin—well, you'd find triumphal arches along the way, with common soldiers sculptured on the stone, every bit the same as generals. In two or three years, and without imposing taxes on any of you, Napoleon filled his vaults with gold, built palaces, made bridges, roads, scholars, *fêtes*, laws, vessels, harbours, and spent millions upon millions—such enormous sums that he could, so they tell me, have paved France from end to end with five-franc pieces, if he had had a mind to.

“Now, when he sat at ease on his throne, and was master of all, so that Europe waited

his permission to do his bidding, he remembered his four brothers and his three sisters, and he said to us, as it might be in conversation, in an order of the day, ‘My children, is it right that the blood relations of your Emperor should be begging their bread?’



No. I wish to see them in splendour like myself. It becomes, therefore, absolutely necessary to conquer a kingdom for each of them—to the end that Frenchmen may be masters over all lands, that the soldiers of the Guard shall make the whole earth tremble, that France may spit where she likes, and that all the nations shall say to her, as it is written on my copper coins, ‘God protects you!’ ‘Agreed!’ cried the army. ‘We’ll go fish for thy kingdoms with our bayonets.’ Ha! There was no backing down,

don't you see! If he had taken it into his head to conquer the moon, we should have made ready, packed knapsacks, and clambered up; happily, he didn't think of it. The kings of the countries, who liked their comfortable thrones, were, naturally, loath to budge, and had to have their ears pulled; so then—Forward, march! We did march; we got there;

and the earth once more trembled to its centre. Hey! The men and the shoes he used up in those days! The enemy dealt us such blows that none but the grand army could have borne the fatigue of it. But you are not ignorant that a Frenchman is born a philosopher, and knows that a little sooner, or a little later, he has got to die. So we were ready to die without a word, for we liked to see the Emperor doing that on the geographies.”

Here the narrator nimbly described a circle with his foot on the floor of the barn.

“And Napoleon said, ‘There, that’s to be a kingdom.’ And a kingdom it was. Ha! The good times! The colonels were generals; the generals, marshals; and the marshals, kings. There’s one of ‘em still on his throne, to prove it to Europe; but he’s a Gascon and a traitor to France for keeping that crown; and he doesn’t blush for shame as he ought to do, because crowns, don’t you see, are made of gold. I who am speaking to you, I have seen, in Paris, eleven kings and a mob of princes surrounding Napoleon like the rays of the sun. You understand, of course, that every soldier had the chance to mount a throne, provided always he had the merit; so a corporal of the Guard was a sight to be looked at as he walked along, for each man had his share in the victory, and ‘twas plainly set forth in the bulletin. What victories they were! Austerlitz, where the army manoeuvred as if on parade; Eylau, where we drowned the Russians in a lake, as though Napoleon had blown them

into it with the breath of his mouth; Wagram, where the army fought for three days without grumbling. We won as many battles as there are saints in the calendar. It was proved then, beyond a doubt, that Napoleon had the sword of God in his scabbard. The soldiers were his friends; he made them his children; he looked after us, he saw that we had shoes, and shirts, and great-coats, and bread, and cartridges; but he always kept up his majesty; for, don’t you see, ‘twas his business to reign. No matter for that, however; a sergeant, and even a common soldier, could say to him, ‘my Emperor,’ just as you say to me sometimes, ‘my good friend.’ He gave us an answer if we appealed to him; he slept in the snow like the rest of us; and, indeed, he had almost the air of a human man. I who speak to you, I have seen him with his feet among the grape-shot, and no more uneasy than you are now—standing steady, looking through his field-glass, and minding his business. ‘Twas that kept the rest of us quiet. I don’t know how he did it, but when he spoke he made our hearts burn within us; and to show him we were his children, incapable of balking, didn’t we rush at the mouths of the rascally cannon, that belched and vomited shot and shell, without so much as saying, ‘Look out!’ Why the dying must need raise their heads to salute him and cry, ‘LONG LIVE THE EMPEROR!’

“I ask you, was that natural? Would they have done that for a human man?

“Well, after he had settled the world, the Empress Josephine, his wife, a good woman all the same, managed matters so that she did not bear him any children, and he was obliged to give her up, though he loved her considerably. But, you see, he had to have little ones for reasons of state. Hearing of this, all the sovereigns of Europe quarrelled as to which of them should give him a wife. And he married, so they told us, an Austrian archduchess, daughter of Caesar, an ancient man about whom people talk a good deal, and not in France only—where any one will tell you what he did—but in Europe. It is all true, for I myself who address you at this moment, I have been on the Danube, and have seen the remains of a bridge built by that man, who, it seems, was a relation of Napoleon in Rome, and that’s how the Emperor got the inheritance of that city for his son. So after the marriage, which was a *fête* for the whole world, and in honour of which he released the people of ten years’ taxes—which they had to pay all the same, however, because the assessors didn’t take account of what he said—his wife had a little one, who was King of Rome. Now, there’s a thing that had never been seen on this earth; never before was a child born a king with his father living. On that day a balloon went up in Paris to tell the news to Rome, and that balloon made the journey in one day.

“Now, is there any man among you who will stand up here and declare to me that all

that was human? No; it was written above; and may the scurvy seize ‘em who deny that he was sent by God himself for the triumph of France!

“Well, here’s the Emperor of Russia, that used to be his friend, he gets angry because Napoleon didn’t marry a Russian; so he joins with the English, our enemies—to whom our Emperor always wanted to say a couple of words in their burrows, only he was prevented. Napoleon gets angry too; an end had to be put to such doings; so he says to us: ‘Soldiers! You have been masters of every capital in Europe, except Moscow, which is now the ally of England. To conquer England, and India which belongs to the English, it becomes our peremptory duty to go to Moscow,’ Then he assembled the greatest army that ever trailed its gaiters over the globe; and so marvellously in hand it was that he reviewed a million of men in one day. ‘Hourra!’ cried the Russians. Down came all Russia and those animals of Cossacks in a flock. ‘Twas nation against nation, a general hurly-burly, and beware who could; ‘Asia against Europe,’ as the Red Man had foretold to Napoleon. ‘Enough,’ cried the Emperor, ‘I’ll be ready.’

“So now, sure enough, came all the kings, as the Red Man had said, to lick Napoleon’s hand! Austria, Prussia, Bavaria, Saxony, Poland, Italy, every one of them were with us, flattering us; ah, it was fine! The eagles never cawed so loud as at those parades, perched high above the banners

of all Europe. The Poles were bursting with joy, because Napoleon was going to release them; and that's why France and Poland are brothers to this day. 'Russia is ours,' cried the army. We plunged into it well-supplied; we marched and we marched—no Russians. At last we found the brutes entrenched on the banks of the Moskva. That's where I won my cross, and I've got the right to say it was a damnable battle. This was how it came about. The Emperor was anxious. He had seen the Red Man, who said to him 'My son, you are going too fast for your feet; you will lack men; friends will betray you.' So the Emperor offered peace. But before signing, 'Let us drub those Russians!' he said to us. 'Done!' cried the army. 'Forward, march!' said the sergeants. My clothes were in rags, my shoes worn out, from trudging along those roads, which are very uncomfortable ones; but no matter! I said to myself, 'As it's the last of our earthquakings, I'll go into it, tooth and nail!' We were drawn up in line before the great ravine—front seats, as 'twere. Signal given; and seven hundred pieces of artillery began a conversation that would bring the blood from your ears. Then—must do justice to one's enemies—the Russians let themselves be killed like Frenchmen; they wouldn't give way; we couldn't advance. 'Forward!' some one cried, 'here comes the Emperor!' True enough; he passed at a gallop, waving his hand to let us know we must take the redoubt. He inspired us; on we ran; I was the first in the ravine.

Ha! My God! How the lieutenants fell, and the colonels, and the soldiers! No matter! All the more shoes for those that had none, and epaulets for the clever ones who knew how to read. 'Victory!' cried the whole line; 'Victory!'—and, would you believe it? A thing never seen before, there lay twenty-five thousand Frenchmen on the ground. 'Twas like mowing down a wheat-field; only in place of the ears of wheat put the heads of men! We were sobered by this time—those who were left alive. The man rode up; we made the circle round him. Ha! He knew how to cajole his children; he could be amiable when he liked, and feed 'em with words when their stomachs were ravenous with the hunger of wolves. Flatterer! He distributed the crosses himself, he uncovered to the dead, and then he cried to us, 'On to Moscow!' 'To Moscow!' answered the army.

"We took Moscow. Would you believe it? the Russians burned their own city! 'Twas a haystack six miles square, and it blazed for two days. The buildings crashed like slates, and showers of melted iron and lead rained down upon us, which was naturally horrible. I may say to you plainly, it was like a flash of lightning on our disasters. The Emperor said, 'We have done enough; my soldiers shall rest here.' So we rested awhile, just to get the breath into our bodies and the flesh on our bones, for we were really tired. We took possession of the golden cross that was on the Kremlin; and every soldier brought away

with him a small fortune. But out there the winter sets in a month earlier—a thing those fools of science didn't properly explain. So, coming back, the cold nipped us. No longer an army—do you hear me?—no longer any generals, no longer any sergeants even. 'Twas the reign of wretchedness and hunger—a reign of equality at last. No one thought of anything but to see France once more; no one stooped to pick up his gun or his money if he dropped them; each man followed his nose, and went as he pleased without caring for glory. The weather was so bad the Emperor couldn't see his star; there was something between him and the skies. Poor man! It made him ill to see his eagles flying away from victory. Ah! 'Twas a mortal blow, you may believe me.

“Well, we got to the Beresina, My friends, I can affirm to you by all that is most sacred, by my honour, that since mankind came into the world, never, never was there seen such a fricassee of any army—guns, carriages, artillery-wagons—in the midst of such snows, under such relentless skies! The muzzles of the muskets burned our hands if we touched them, the iron was so cold. It was there that the army was saved by the pontoniers, who were firm at their post; and there that Gondrin—sole survivor of the men who were bold enough to go into the water and build the bridges by which the army crossed—that Gondrin, here present, admirably conducted himself, and saved us from the

Russians, who, I must tell you, still respected the grand army, remembering its victories. And,” he added, pointing to Gondrin, who was gazing at him with the peculiar attention of a deaf man, “Gondrin is a finished soldier, a soldier who is honour itself, and he merits your highest esteem.

“I saw the Emperor,” he resumed, “standing by the bridge, motionless, not feeling the cold—was that human? He looked at the destruction of his treasure, his friends, his old Egyptians. Bah! All that passed him, women, army-wagons, artillery, all were shattered, destroyed, ruined. The bravest carried the eagles; for the eagles, d'ye see, were France, the nation, all of you! They were the civil and the military honour that must be kept pure; could their heads be lowered because of the cold? It was only near the Emperor that we warmed ourselves, because when he was in danger we ran, frozen as we were—we, who wouldn't have stretched a hand to save a friend. They told us he wept at night over his poor family of soldiers. Ah! None but he and Frenchmen could have got themselves out of that business. We did get out, but with losses, great losses, as I tell you. The Allies captured our provisions. Men began to betray him, as the Red Man predicted. Those chatterers in Paris, who had held their tongues after the Imperial Guard was formed, now thought he was dead; so they hoodwinked the prefect of police, and hatched a conspiracy to overthrow the em-

pire. He heard of it; it worried him. He left us, saying: 'Adieu, my children; guard the outposts; I shall return to you,' Bah! Without him nothing went right; the generals lost their heads, the marshals talked nonsense and committed follies; but that was not surprising, for Napoleon, who was kind, had fed 'em on gold; they had got as fat as lard, and wouldn't stir; some stayed in camp when they ought to have been warming the backs of the enemy who was between us and France.

"But the Emperor came back, and he brought recruits, famous recruits; he changed their backbone and made 'em dogs of war, fit to set their teeth into anything; and he brought a guard of honour, a fine body indeed!—all bourgeois, who melted away like butter on a gridiron.

"Well, spite of our stern bearing, here's everything going against us; and yet the army did prodigies of valour. Then came battles on the mountains, nations against nations—Dresden, Lützen, Bautzen. Remember these days, all of you, for 'twas then that Frenchmen were so particularly heroic that a good grenadier only lasted six months. We triumphed always; yet there were those English, in our rear, rousing revolts against us with their lies! No matter, we cut our way home through the whole pack of the nations. Wherever the Emperor showed himself we followed him; for if, by sea or land, he gave us the word 'Go!' we went. At last, we were in France; and many a poor foot-soldier felt

the air of his own country restore his soul to satisfaction, spite of the wintry weather. I can say for myself that it refreshed my life. Well, next, our business was to defend France, our country, our beautiful France, against, all Europe, which resented our having laid down the law to the Russians, and pushed them back into their dens so that they couldn't eat us up alive, as northern nations, who are dainty and like southern flesh, have a habit of doing—at least, so I've heard some generals say. Then the Emperor saw his own father-in-law, his friends whom he had made kings, and the scoundrels to whom he had given back their thrones, all against him. Even Frenchmen, and allies in our own ranks, turned against us under secret orders, as at the battle of Leipsic. Would common soldiers have been capable of such wickedness? Three times a day men were false to their word—and they called themselves princes!

"So, then, France was invaded. Wherever the Emperor showed his lion face, the enemy retreated; and he did more prodigies in defending France than ever he had done in conquering Italy, the East, Spain, Europe, and Russia. He meant to bury every invader under the sod, and teach 'em to respect the soil of France. So he let them get to Paris, that he might swallow them at a mouthful, and rise to the height of his genius in a battle greater than all the rest—a mother-battle, as 'twere. But there, there! The Parisians were afraid for their twopenny skins, and their

trumpery shops; they opened the gates. Then the Ragusades began, and happiness ended. The Empress was fooled, and the white banner flaunted from the windows. The generals whom he had made his nearest friends abandoned him for the Bourbons—a set of people no one had heard tell of. The Emperor bade us farewell at Fontainebleau: ‘Soldiers!’—I can hear him now; we wept like children; the flags and the eagles were lowered as if for a funeral: it was, I may well say it to you, it was the funeral of the Empire; her dapper armies were nothing now but skeletons. So he said to us, standing there on the portico of his palace: ‘My soldiers! We are vanquished by treachery; but we shall meet in heaven, the country of the brave. Defend my child, whom I commit to you. Long live Napoleon II!’ He meant to die, that no man should look upon Napoleon vanquished; he took poison, enough to have killed a regiment, because, like Jesus Christ before his Passion, he thought himself abandoned of God and his talisman. But the poison did not hurt him.

“See again! He found he was immortal.

“Sure of himself, knowing he must ever be The Emperor, he went for a while to an island to study out the nature of these others, who, you may be sure, committed follies without end. Whilst he bided his time down there, the Chinese, and the wild men on the coast of Africa, and the Barbary States, and others who are not at all accommodating, know so well he was more than man

that they respected his tent, saying to touch it would be to offend God. Thus, d’ye see, when these others turned him from the doors of his own France, he still reigned over the whole world. Before long he embarked in the same little cockleshell of a boat he had had in Egypt, sailed round the beard of the English, set foot in France, and France acclaimed him. The sacred cuckoo flew from spire to spire; all France cried out with one voice, ‘LONG LIVE THE EMPEROR!’ In this region, here, the enthusiasm for that wonder of the ages was, I may say, solid. Dauphine behaved well; and I am particularly pleased to know that her people wept when they saw, once more, the gray top-coat. March first it was, when Napoleon landed with two hundred men to conquer that kingdom of France and of Navarre, which, on the twentieth of the same month was again the French Empire. On that day our man was in Paris; he had made a clean sweep, recovered his dear France, and gathered his veterans together by saying no more than three words, ‘I am here.’

“‘Twas the greatest miracle God had yet done! Before him, did ever man recover an empire by showing his hat? And these others, who thought they had subdued France! Not they! At sight of the eagles, a national army sprang up, and we marched to Waterloo. There, the Guard died at one blow. Napoleon, in despair, threw himself three times before the cannon of the enemy without obtaining death. We saw that. The battle

was lost. That night the Emperor called his old soldiers to him; on the field soaked with our blood he burned his banners and his eagles—his poor eagles, ever victorious, who cried ‘Forward’ in the battles, and had flown the length and breadth of Europe, they were saved the infamy of belonging to the enemy: all the treasures of England couldn’t get her a tail-feather of them. No more eagles—the rest is well known. The Red Man went over to the Bourbons, like the scoundrel that he is. France is crushed; the soldier is nothing; they deprive him of his dues; they discharge him to make room for broken-down nobles—ah, ‘tis pitiable! They seized Napoleon by treachery; the English nailed him on a desert island in mid-ocean on a rock raised ten thousand feet above the earth; and there he is, and will be, till the Red Man gives him back his power for the happiness of France. These others say he’s dead. Ha, dead! ‘Tis easy to see they don’t know Him. They tell that fib to catch the people, and feel safe in their hovel of a government. Listen! The truth at the bottom of it all is that his friends have left him alone on the desert isle to fulfil a prophecy, for I forgot to say that his name, Napoleon, means ‘lion of the desert.’ Now this that I tell you is true as the Gospel. All other tales that you hear about the Emperor are follies without common-sense; because, d’ye see, God never gave to child of woman born the right to stamp his name in red as he did, on the earth, which forever shall remember him! Long live

Napoleon, the father of his people and of the soldier!”