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Title: The war drama of the Eagles

Napoleon's standard-bearers on the battlefield in victory and defeat from Austerlitz to Waterloo, a record of hard fighting, heroism, and adventure

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\*\*\* START OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK THE WAR DRAMA OF THE EAGLES \*\*\*

Transcriber’s Note: Italics are enclosed in \_underscores\_. Additional

notes will be found near the end of this ebook.

THE WAR DRAMA

OF THE EAGLES

[Illustration: PORTE-AIGLE, IMPERIAL GUARD, AND GRENADIER SERGEANT IN

PARADE UNIFORM.

From St. Hilaire’s \_Histoire de la Garde Impériale\_.]

THE WAR DRAMA

OF THE EAGLES

NAPOLEON’S STANDARD-BEARERS ON THE

BATTLEFIELD IN VICTORY AND DEFEAT

FROM AUSTERLITZ TO WATERLOO

A RECORD OF HARD FIGHTING, HEROISM

AND ADVENTURE

BY EDWARD FRASER

AUTHOR OF “THE ENEMY AT TRAFALGAR,” “FAMOUS

FIGHTERS OF THE FLEET,” “THE ‘LONDONS,’” ETC.

“These Eagles to you shall ever be your rallying-point. Swear

to sacrifice your lives in their defence; to maintain them by

your courage ever in the path of victory.”--\_On the Day of the

Presentation on the Field of Mars.\_

“The soldier who loses his Eagle loses his Honour and his All!”

\_Address to the 4th of the Line after Austerlitz.\_

“The loss of an Eagle is an affront to the reputation of its

regiment for which neither victory nor the glory acquired on a

hundred fields can make amends.”

\_55th Bulletin of the Grand Army\_: 1807.

NAPOLEON.

WITH ILLUSTRATIONS AND MAPS

LONDON

JOHN MURRAY, ALBEMARLE STREET, W.

1912

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PREFACE

This book breaks fresh ground in a field of romantic and widespread

interest; one that should prove attractive, associated as it is with

the ever-fascinating subject of Napoleon. Incidentally, indeed, it

may also help to throw a new sidelight on certain characteristics of

Napoleon as a soldier.

I venture to hope at the same time that it will arouse interest

further as offering independent testimony to the valour of our own

soldiers, the Old British Army which, under Wellington, defeated on

the battlefield the veterans of the Eagles whose feats of heroism and

hardihood are described in the book. Magnificent as were the acts of

fine daring and heroic endurance of the men whom Wellington led to

victory, no less stirring and deserving of admiration were the deeds of

chivalrous valour and stern fortitude done for the honour of Napoleon’s

Eagles by the gallant soldiers who faced them and proved indeed foemen

worthy of their steel. All who hold in regard cool, self-sacrificing

bravery and steadfast courage in adversity and peril will find no lack

of instances in the stories of what the warriors of the Eagles dared

and underwent for the name and fame of the Great Captain.

The record of Napoleon’s Eagles in war has never before been set forth,

and the centenary year of Badajoz and Salamanca and the Moscow Campaign

seems to offer a befitting occasion for its appearance.

The world, indeed, is in the midst of a cycle of Napoleonic

centenaries. Our own centenary memories of Talavera--the victory of

which Wellington said, in later years, that if his Allies had done

their part, “it would have been as great a battle as Waterloo”--of

Busaco ridge and Torres Vedras, of heroic Barrosa and desperate

Albuhera,--these are only just behind us. Immediately ahead lie the

centenaries of yet greater events. In less than a twelvemonth hence

England will mark the centenary of Vittoria, Wellington’s decisive day

in Spain, the crowning triumph of the Peninsular War; and yet more

than that in its import and sequel for Europe. It was the news of

Vittoria that, in July 1813, decided Napoleon’s father-in-law to throw

Austria’s sword into the balance against the Man of Destiny, compelling

Napoleon, with what remained of the Grand Army, to stand at bay for the

“Battle of the Nations” on the Marchfeldt before Leipsic. Within six

months from then, the world, in like manner, will recall the Farewell

of Fontainebleau, and Elba; and finally, in the year after that, the

British Empire will commemorate the epoch-making centenary of the

greatest of all British triumphs in arms on land--

“Of that fierce field where last the Eagles swooped,

Where our Great Master wielded Britain’s sword,

And the Dark Soul the world could not subdue,

Bowed to thy fortune, Prince of Waterloo!”

--the triple-event, indeed, of Waterloo, the \_Bellerophon\_, St. Helena.

The stories told here exist indeed, even in France, only in more or

less fragmentary form, scattered broadcast amongst the memoirs left

by the men of the Napoleonic time. They have not before been brought

together within the covers of a book.

I have utilised, in addition to the personal memoirs of Napoleon’s

officers, French regimental records, bulletins, and despatches (noted

in my List of Authorities), other official military documents,

contemporary newspapers, both British and foreign, and information

kindly placed at my disposal by the authorities of Chelsea Royal

Hospital and the Royal United Service Institution, and by friends

abroad.

EDWARD FRASER.

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(NOTE.--This list is approximately complete, representing about 90

per cent. of the total of authorities consulted and laid under

contribution.)

THE WAR DRAMA OF THE EAGLES

CHAPTER I

NAPOLEON ADOPTS THE EAGLE OF CAESAR

Napoleon Bonaparte became Emperor, “by Divine Will and the Constitution

of the French Republic”--Imperator and hereditary Caesar of the

Republic--on Friday, May 18, 1804. Three weeks later it was publicly

announced in the \_Moniteur\_ that the Eagle had been adopted as the

heraldic cognisance of the new \_régime\_ in France.

Its selection for the State armorial bearing of the Empire was one

of Napoleon’s first acts. That the Roman lictor’s axe and fasces

surmounted by the red Phrygian cap, with its traditions of revolution,

which had supplanted the Fleur-de-Lis of the Monarchy, and had served

as the official badge on the standards of the Republic and the

Consulate, should continue under the Imperial \_régime\_, was obviously

impossible. But what distinctive emblem should be adopted in its stead?

Napoleon had the question debated in his presence at the first \_séance\_

of the Imperial Council of State. He had, it would seem, not made up

his mind in regard to it. At any rate, a few days before the meeting

of the Council, he had directed a Committee to draw up a statement and

offer suggestions.

The matter was brought forward at the first meeting of the Imperial

Council, held at the Château of Saint-Cloud on Tuesday, June 12,

1804, after a preliminary discussion on the arrangements for the

Coronation, when and where it should be held, and what was to be the

form of ceremonial. The Coronation, all agreed at the outset, must

take place in the current year. Rheims, Aix-la-Chapelle, and Paris, in

turn, were suggested as suitable places for the ceremony, Paris being

finally decided on; the scene of the event to be the Champ de Mars.

Napoleon himself proposed the Champs de Mars, with a threefold ceremony

there--the taking of the constitutional oath, the actual coronation,

the presentation of the Emperor to the assembled people. A brief

discussion followed on the form of the coronation ceremony, whether it

should be accompanied by religious rites. It was put forward that, as

Charlemagne had received his authority from the Pope, might not the

Pope now be induced to visit Paris and personally crown the Emperor?

Napoleon, intervening in the discussion, made a strong point of the

necessity of some kind of religious service on the occasion. He did not

care much, he cynically remarked, what religion was selected; only it

must be in accordance with the views of the majority of the nation. It

would be impossible to do without some sort of religious observance. In

all nations, said he, Ceremonies of State were accompanied by religious

services. As to asking the Pope to take part, from his point of view,

at the moment, the attendance of a Papal legate would be preferable.

If the Pope himself came to Paris, his presence would assuredly tend

to relegate the Emperor to a secondary position: “Tout le monde me

laisserait pour courir voir le Pape!” The matter, however, as the

discussion proceeded, seemed to present so many difficulties, that

the Council, after declaring themselves generally against having any

religious ceremony at all, decided to leave the question for further

consideration.

On that the Council turned to deal with the selection of the heraldic

insignia and official badge of the Empire.

[Sidenote: THE GALLIC COCK PROPOSED]

Senator Crétet, on behalf of the special Committee appointed by

Napoleon to prepare a statement for the Council, presented his report.

The Committee, he said, had decided unanimously to recommend the Cock,

the historic national emblem of Ancient Gaul, as the most fitting

cognisance for Imperial France. Should that not find favour with the

Council, either the Eagle, the Lion, or the Elephant, in the opinion

of the Committee, might well be adopted. Individual members of the

Committee, added Crétet, had further suggested the Aegis of Minerva, or

some flower like the Fleur-de-Lis, an Oak-tree, or an Ear of Corn.

Miot, one of the members of the Council, rose as Crétet sat down, and

protested against the re-introduction of the Fleur-de-Lis. That, he

said, was imbecility. He proposed a figure of the Emperor seated on his

throne as the best possible badge for the French Empire.

He was not seconded, however, and Napoleon interposed abruptly to

set aside the Committee’s suggestion of reviving the Gallic Cock. He

dismissed that notion with a contemptuous sneer. “Bah,” he exclaimed,

“the Cock belongs to the farmyard! It is far too feeble a creature!”

(“Le Coq est de basse cour. C’est un animal trop faible!”) Napoleon

spoke rapidly and vivaciously. He had not yet, in those early days,

acquired the impressive Imperial style that he afterwards affected.

“His language at these earlier Council meetings was still impregnated

with his original Jacobin style; he spoke frequently, spontaneously,

familiarly; monologued at the top of his voice (avec des éclats de

voix); apostrophised frequently, appearing at times as though overcome

with nervousness, now almost in tears, now breaking out in a frenzy of

passion, unrestrainedly emphasising his personal likes and dislikes.”

[Sidenote: THE LION--THE ELEPHANT--THE BEE]

Count Ségur, Imperial Grand Master of the Ceremonies, suggested the

Lion as the most suitable emblem: “parcequ’il vaincra le Léopard,” he

explained.

Councillor Laumond proposed the adoption of the Elephant instead; with

for a motto “\_Mole et Mente\_.” The Elephant had a great vogue at that

day among European heraldic authorities as being pre-eminently a royal

beast. There was a widely prevalent belief, on the authority of old

writers on natural history, that an Elephant could not be made to bow

its knees. Further, too, the elephant typified resistless strength as

well as magnanimity. And had not Caesar himself once placed the effigy

of the Elephant on the Roman coinage? Nobody else at the Council,

however, seemed to care for the Elephant.

Councillor Simon objected to Ségur’s proposition, on the score that the

Lion was essentially an aggressive beast.

Cambacérès, ex-Consul and Arch-Chancellor of the Empire, suggested a

swarm of Bees as the most suitable national emblem. It would represent

the actual situation of France, he explained--a republic with a

presiding chief.

Councillor Lacuèe supported Cambacérès. The Bee, he added, was the

more suitable, in that it possessed a sting as well as being a maker of

honey.

Cambacérès remarked that he favoured the idea of the Bee as typifying

peaceful industry rather than offensive power.

The other members took no interest in the idea of the Bee, and after

some discursive talk the Council fell back on the Committee’s original

suggestion of the historic Gallic Cock. The general voice favoured the

adoption of the Cock, and they unanimously voted for it.

That, however, would not do for Napoleon. He sharply refused once more

to hear of the Cock in any circumstances. He had for some minutes sat

silent, listening to the discussion until the vote was taken. On that

he rose and banned the Cock absolutely and finally.

“The Cock is quite too weak a creature,” he exclaimed. “A thing like

that cannot possibly be the cognisance of an Empire such as France. You

must make your choice between the Eagle, the Elephant, and the Lion!”

The Eagle, however, did not commend itself to the Council. That emblem,

it was pointed out by several members, had been already adopted by

other European nations. For France, such being the case, the Eagle

would not be sufficiently distinctive. The German Empire had the Eagle

for its cognisance. So had Austria. So had Prussia. So had Poland

even--the White Eagle of the Jagellons. The Council was plainly not

attracted by the Eagle.

Lebrun, the other ex-Consul, Arch-Treasurer of the Empire, now put in

a word again for the Fleur-de-Lis. It had been, he said, the national

emblem of France under all the previous dynasties. The Fleur-de-Lis,

declared Lebrun, was the real historic emblem of France, and he

proposed that it should be adopted for the Empire.

Nobody, though, supported him, one member, Councillor Regnaud,

condemning the idea of the Fleur-de-Lis as utterly out of date. “The

nation,” added Regnaud, with a sneer, “will neither go back to the cult

of the Lilies nor to the religion of Rome!”

[Sidenote: “YOU MUST CHOOSE THE LION!”]

At that point Napoleon lost patience. Interposing to close the

discussion, he curtly bade the Council to cease from wasting time.

They must decide on the Lion for the Imperial Emblem. His preference

was for the figure of a Lion, lying over the map of France, with one

paw stretched out across the Rhine: “Il faut prendre un Lion, s’étendu

sur la carte de France, la patte prête à dépasser le Rhin.” Napoleon

proposed in addition, by way of motto, beneath the Lion-figure, these

defiant words: “\_Malheur à qui me cherche!\_”

No more was said on the subject after that. The Council submitted

forthwith to Napoleon’s dictation, and, as it would appear, without

taking any formal vote, passed to the remaining business of the day:

the inscription on the new coinage and certain amendments to the

Criminal Code.

But even then, as it befell, the decision as to the national emblem was

not conclusive. Napoleon changed his mind about the Lion shortly after

the Council had broken up. The Lion as the designated cognisance of

the French Empire did not last twenty-four hours. Napoleon himself, on

the report of the Council meeting being presented for his signature,

definitely rejected the Lion. He cancelled his own proposition with a

stroke of his pen. With his own hand the Emperor struck out the words

“Lion couchant,” with the reference to the map of France and the Rhine,

writing over the erasure, “Un Aigle éploye”--an Eagle with extended

wings. So Napoleon independently settled the matter.

Napoleon, as it would appear, in making his ultimate choice of the

Eagle, had this in his mind. Charlemagne was ever in his thoughts at

that time as his own destined exemplar. The Eagle of Charlemagne, it

was now borne in upon his mind irresistibly, had a pre-eminent claim to

be recalled and become the national heraldic badge for the new Frankish

Empire of the West, as having been the traditional emblem of Imperial

authority in the ancient Frankish Empire, the prototype and historic

predecessor of the Empire of which he was head. Said Napoleon, indeed,

in justifying his final adoption of the Eagle: “Elle affirme la dignité

Impériale et rappelait Charlemagne.”

[Sidenote: WHERE THE ARTIST GOT HIS DESIGN]

A commission to design the new Imperial Eagle “after that of

Charlemagne” was forthwith given to Isabey (the elder Isabey--Jean

Baptiste), “Peintre et Dessinateur du Cabinet de l’Empereur,” whose

reputation was at that moment at its zenith. The artist, however,

had no Carlovingian model to draw from, and nobody, it would appear,

could give him any advice. He had to depict “Un Aigle éployé”--a

Spread-Eagle. Discarding heraldic conventionalism, he produced the

Napoleonic Eagle of history; an Eagle \_au naturel\_, shown in the act of

taking wing. The idea of it Isabey took from a sketch he himself had

made nine years before, in the Monastery of the Certosa of Milan, of an

eagle sculptured on one of the tombs of the Visconti.

Following on his adoption of the Eagle for the cognisance of the Empire

at large, Napoleon announced that the Eagle would in future be the

battle-standard of the Army. He had, though, as to that Eagle, yet

another thought in his mind. For his soldiers he desired the French

Eagle to represent the military standard of Ancient Rome, the historic

emblem of Caesar’s legionaries, with its resplendent traditions of

world-wide victory. That intention, furthermore, Napoleon went out

of his way to emphasise significantly through the place and moment

that he chose for the promulgation of the Army Order appointing the

Eagle of the Caesars as the battle-standard of the French Empire. The

Imperial rescript was dated from the Camp of the “Army of the Ocean” at

Boulogne; from amidst the vast array of soldiers mustered there for the

threatened invasion of England.

At the same time Isabey’s design for one Eagle would suffice as a

model for the other. It sufficiently suggested the Roman type. Like

Charlemagne, had not Napoleon led his army across the Alps? like

Caesar, was he not about to lead it across the Straits?

“The Eagle with wings outspread, as on the Imperial Seal, will be

at the head of the standard-staves, as was the practice in the

Roman army--(\_placée au sommet du bâton, telle que la portaient les

Romains\_). The flag will be attached at the same distance beneath

the Eagle, as was the Labarum.” So Napoleon wrote in his preliminary

instructions from Boulogne to Marshal Berthier, Head of the Etat-Major

of the “Army of England,” at that moment on duty at the War Office in

Paris.

The Eagle, Napoleon directed, was of itself to constitute the standard:

“\_Essentiellement constituer l’étendard\_,” were Napoleon’s words. He

set a secondary value on the flag which the Eagle surmounted. The flag

to Napoleon was a subsidiary adjunct.

[Sidenote: THE FLAG OF MINOR ACCOUNT]

Flags, of course, would come and go. They could be renewed, he wrote,

as might be necessary, at any time; every two years, or oftener. The

Eagle, on the other hand, was to be a permanency. It was to be for

all time the standard of its corps: also, to add still further to its

sacrosanct nature and \_éclat\_, every Eagle would be received only from

the hands of the Emperor.[1]

Every Battalion of Foot and Squadron of Horse was to have its Eagle,

which, on parade and before the enemy under fire, would be in the

special charge of the battalion or squadron sergeant-major, with

an escort of picked veteran soldiers; “men who had distinguished

themselves on the battlefield in at least two combats.”

Exceptional care, Napoleon laid down, was to be taken by regimental

commanders that no harm should befall the Eagle. In the event of

accident happening to it, a special report was to be made direct to

the Emperor. Should it unfortunately happen that the Eagle was lost in

battle, the regiment concerned would have to prove to the Emperor’s

satisfaction that there had been no default. No new Eagle would be

granted in place of one lost until the regiment in question had atoned

for the slur on its character by either achieving “\_éclatante\_”

distinction in the field, by some exceptionally brilliant feat of arms,

or by presenting the Emperor with an enemy’s standard “taken by its own

valour.”

The silken tricolor flag, as has been said, was in the eyes of Napoleon

of subordinate account. It was to be considered merely as a set-off

to the Eagle, as merely “\_l’ornement de l’Aigle\_.” The Eagle, and the

Eagle only, must be the object of the soldier’s devotion. Napoleon

paid little regard to the flag, beyond as being of use for displaying

the record of a regiment’s war career. He would have liked indeed, as

it would seem, to substitute another flag altogether, and went so far

as to have designs for a green regimental flag submitted to him.[2]

Prudence, however, forbade its introduction, and directions were

issued that the general pattern of tricolor standard in use under the

Consulate should be retained, with minor alterations of detail in the

design rendered necessary in consequence of the new constitution of the

State.

[Sidenote: THE LEGEND ON THE FLAG]

The regimental flags would consist of a white diamond-shaped centre,

with the corners of the flag alternately red and blue; according to the

pattern authorised two years previously by Napoleon as First Consul.

Thus the national colours would continue to be represented. For the

Infantry, in the centre of each flag would be, on one side, the words

“Empire Français,” with the legend, inscribed in letters of gold,

“L’Empereur des Français au --^e Régiment d’Infanterie de Ligne,” which

would take the place of the Republican inscription hitherto borne

there; the number of each corps being inscribed in the blank space and

in a laurel chaplet embroidered at each corner of the flag. For Cavalry

the inscription ran: “L’Empereur des Français au --^e Cuirassiers,” or

“au --^e Chasseurs”; and so on for other corps, Artillery, Dragoons,

and Hussars.

On the reverse, for corps of all arms, with the exception of the Guard,

was emblazoned the motto “Valeur et Discipline,” and beneath it the

number of the battalion or squadron in each regiment.

Below the numbers was added any Inscription of Honour which had been

granted to the corps, such as, in the case of one regiment, “Le 15^e

est couvert de la Gloire”; in the case of another, “Le Terrible 57^e

qui rien n’arrête”; with others, “Le Bon et Brave 28^e”; “Le 75^e

arrive et bât l’Ennemi”; “J’étais tranquille, le brave 32^e était là”;

“Il n’est pas possible d’être plus brave que le 63^e”; “Brave 18^e, je

vous connais. L’Ennemi ne tiendra pas devant vous”; and so on. These

were mostly quotations from “mentions in despatches” made by Napoleon

in regard to regiments in his famous “Army of Italy,” authorised by

him, at first of his own initiative, and later as First Consul, to be

recorded as Inscriptions of Honour on the regimental colours. The flags

of other corps bore names of victories of note in which the regiments

had taken part; as, for instance, “Rivoli,” “Lodi,” “Marengo.”[3]

[Sidenote: PROPOSED FOR CORONATION DAY]

Napoleon overlooked nothing that might add to the prestige of his

Eagles. Not only would he himself personally present its Eagle to

each regiment, but, further, there would be at the outset a general

presentation of Eagles in Paris to the whole Army, which would be

made a State event of significance, and form an integral part of

the ceremony of his Coronation. On that Napoleon had insisted, in

reply to a technical legal objection raised at one of the meetings

of the Council of State. It was not to be a Parisian popular show.

He was ready, indeed, he said, to transfer the ceremony to Boulogne.

“Je rassemblerais deux cent mille hommes au camp. Là j’aurais une

population couverte des blessures dont je serais sûr!” He gave

directions that the Presentation of the Eagles should take place on the

Field of Mars in front of the Military School, on the same day as the

Coronation, and should follow immediately after the religious service

and his actual crowning and consecration by the Pope in Notre Dame.[4]

CHAPTER II

THE DAY OF THE PRESENTATION ON THE FIELD OF MARS

[Sidenote: THE DAY FINALLY FIXED]

The Coronation, Napoleon first proposed, should take place in the

Chapel of the Invalides, on the historic day of the 18th Brumaire

(November 9). Directly after it he would proceed in Imperial State,

wearing his crown and robes, to the Field of Mars--the Champ de Mars,

in front of the Military School, a stone’s-throw away--there to

administer the Military Oath of Allegiance to the Army and distribute

the Eagles at a grand review to be attended by representative

deputations from every regiment of the Army from all over the Empire,

assembled in Paris for the occasion. It was found preferable, however,

that the Coronation service should take place in the Cathedral of

Notre Dame instead of at the Invalides; and at a later date. Still,

however, Napoleon held to his first idea of proceeding direct from

the Coronation ceremony to the Field of Mars. He insisted that

the presentation of the Eagles should follow as a joint ceremony

immediately after his own consecration service. But there was Josephine

to be considered. She was to accompany Napoleon throughout. The

Empress, for her part, on hearing what was intended, declared herself

physically incapable of bearing the strain of the double ceremony, and,

in the result, Napoleon changed his original purpose at the eleventh

hour. He consented to put off the presentation of the Eagles until the

following morning. That plan, in turn, had to be altered. On the very

afternoon of the Coronation, on his return to the Tuileries from Notre

Dame, Napoleon found himself compelled, in consequence of the Empress’s

state of nervous prostration after the fatiguing Cathedral service,

again to defer the ceremony of the presentation of the Eagles. The

Emperor now fixed the following Wednesday, December 5, for the “\_Fête

des Aigles\_,” as the Army spoke of it--three days from then. There was

no further putting off after that.

The plans for the muster were drawn up on a grandiose and elaborate

scale. They provided for an immense attendance under arms of, according

to one account, eighty thousand men; to comprise the Imperial Guard,

and the garrison of Paris, together with special detachments sent to

Paris as representative deputations by every regiment and corps of

the Army, from all over the Empire. Over a thousand Eagles altogether

were to be presented: two hundred and eighty to cavalry regiments; six

hundred odd to infantry, artillery, and special corps; between forty

and fifty to the Navy (one for the crew of every ship of the Line in

commission); besides a hundred and eight to the departmental legions of

the National Guard, the constitutional militia of Revolutionary France,

which Napoleon, for reasons of policy, could not pass over. Every

infantry battalion and cavalry squadron, and brigade (or battery) of

artillery was to have its Eagle.

Each infantry deputation, from both the Imperial Guard and the Line,

would comprise the colonel or regimental commander, four other

officers, and ten sous-officiers and men from each of the three

battalions that at that period made up a French regiment of Foot. In

all, in addition to the regiments of the Imperial Guard, one hundred

and twelve regiments of the Line were to be represented, together with

thirty-one of Light Infantry, twelve of Grenadiers, and one of foreign

infantry. A deputation of fifteen officers and men was to represent

each of the hundred and odd cavalry regiments of the Guard and Line;

and smaller individual detachments would represent the various other

arms and branches of the service appointed to receive Eagles. They

would all pass before the Emperor and receive their Eagles from him

personally, on behalf of their absent comrades, the six hundred

thousand men who at that moment constituted the active field army of

France. From every French ship of the Line in commission there would

in like manner attend ten officers and men.

[Sidenote: THE WHOLE ARMY REPRESENTED]

From far and near the detachments of soldiers and sailors converged

on the capital, marching some of them hundreds of miles from the most

distant frontier garrisons of the Empire, and being several weeks on

the road. The deputations of the First Army Corps, for instance, part

of which was stationed in Hanover, set off early in October; some of

its soldiers, quartered by the Elbe, and with from four to five hundred

miles of road before them, started in the last week of September. The

detachments from Italy and the Venetian frontier, for another instance,

the deputations from the 1st of the Line, the 10th, the 52nd, and 101st

of the Verona garrison, had over eight hundred miles to go, and started

early in September. Quite an army, indeed, was on the move along the

highways of France during October and November; all heading for Paris,

marching by day and being billeted in the towns and villages by night.

A huge series of detachments came from the camp of the “Army of the

Ocean” at Boulogne assembled for the invasion of England. Marshal

Soult, the Commander-in-Chief at Boulogne, with Marshals Davout and

Ney, preceded them, Admiral Bruix, in charge of the Boulogne “Invasion

Flotilla” of gunboats and transports, accompanying Soult. The troops

in Holland; the garrisons of the Rhine fortresses, such as Mayence

and Strasburg, and of Metz; that of Bayonne on the Spanish frontier;

troops at every place of arms and cantonment and regimental dépôt all

over France--all sent their deputations; also every outlying camp,

every naval port along the coast, from the Texel and Antwerp, Brest,

Rochfort, and L’Orient round to Toulon, in the south.

Orders were given in every case that the detachments were each to bring

the existing regimental colours, which, it was understood, were to be

given up on parade in exchange for the Eagles.

A roomy expanse of level ground several acres in extent, an

oblong-shaped area nearly three-quarters of a mile in length and six

hundred yards across, the Field of Mars offered an ideal place for a

showy military spectacle. Thousands of people could look on comfortably

at the display from the turfed slopes of the twenty-feet-high

embankment which skirted the Field of Mars on three sides, and had

been fitted up by the municipality with rows of seats in closely set

tiers. As many as three hundred thousand spectators, indeed, could on

occasion be accommodated there. The fourth side of the Champ de Mars

was bounded by the \_façade\_ of the Ecole Militaire--three great domed

blocks of buildings connected together and affording a grand view of

the scene for hundreds of privileged guests. The entire frontage of

the Military School to the height of the first-floor windows was

taken up for the Day of the Eagles parade by an immense grand-stand,

constructed to form a series of pavilions for the accommodation of the

great official personages invited; with, in the centre, in front of the

lofty colonnaded portico, a magnificently decorated Imperial Pavilion,

whence Napoleon and Josephine seated on their thrones would look on and

receive the homage of the Army.

[Sidenote: THE WEATHER ON THAT MORNING]

The only thing that was unpropitious was the weather. It proved, as

far as the weather went, an unfortunate change of date. The day of the

Coronation, December 2--it was, by the way, Advent Sunday--had been

cold and trying, with lowering clouds overhead, but dry. On the Monday,

Napoleon’s second choice, it was much the same out of doors; and on

the Tuesday the weather kept fair. Then, however, it changed. During

Tuesday afternoon the glass began to go down ominously and a chilly

wind from the south-east set in. Towards ten at night rain and sleet in

incessant showers began to fall--typical Frimaire weather, in keeping

with the character of the “sleety month.” “When it did not rain,” says

somebody, “it snowed, and between whiles it rained and snowed at the

same time.” That was what the weather was like when Wednesday morning

broke; but in spite of it the Imperial programme was to be carried out

in its entirety, and hundreds of thousands of intending spectators

braved the discomfort and started early to get a good place for

witnessing the historic display.

All Paris turned out early, prepared to sit out the day from eight in

the morning until probably after four in the afternoon, packed in dense

masses round the Champ de Mars.

The heavy firing of salvos of artillery soon after dawn, from a dozen

points all over Paris, ushered in the day’s doings. The whole city was

already, as has been said, astir and in the streets, making its way

to the Champ de Mars. Everywhere dark columns of cloaked soldiers,

horse and foot, artillerymen without their guns, were tramping along

through the slush and mud for their posts; some to take part on the

route of the procession, which was to start from the Tuileries; most

of them bound for the Field of Mars. Along the streets to be passed by

the Imperial procession the houses were gaily decked out with festoons

and branches of evergreens, or with coloured hangings and drapings.

Oriental rugs of gorgeous hues and patterns, hired or borrowed for the

Coronation week, hung from most of the windows; they were the favourite

form of decoration. Here and there flags were seen, but it was not the

fashion in Paris at that day to fly flags largely on days of public

rejoicing.

At ten o’clock the cannon again thundered out an Imperial salute--a

hundred and one guns. All knew what that was for, and there was a hush

of expectation all over Paris. The guns meant that the Emperor had

started; that the Imperial State procession had left the Tuileries.

At that moment the chilly drizzle of sleet was still coming down, but

the universal enthusiasm rose superior to the wet and cold. No weather

could damp the anticipations of the excited Parisians over the Imperial

spectacle.

[Sidenote: MURAT COMMANDS THE PARADE]

On the Champ de Mars, as the guns began to fire, the soldiers--all long

since in their places drawn up in closely massed columns, that ranged

right round the parade ground on three sides--stripped off and rolled

up their soaked cloaks, fixed bayonets, and stood to arms. Murat,

Governor of Paris, Commander-in-Chief on the parade, took post in

front of the Imperial Pavilion before the Ecole Militaire: a gorgeous

figure in a bright blue velvet uniform coat, resplendently embroidered

with gold, a lilac sash with crimson stripes round his waist; in

scarlet breeches braided with gold, purple leather Hessians, trimmed

and tasselled with gold, with gleaming gold spurs and sabre-scabbard;

wearing a Marshal’s cocked hat with crimson ostrich-plumes, and mounted

on a no less splendidly caparisoned charger, with leopard-skin and

crimson and gold saddle-trappings. A brilliant \_entourage\_ of staff

officers and dandy aides de camp, daintily attired in pearl-grey

uniforms, with silver lace, or in crimson and green and gold, clustered

in rear of their chief.

Simultaneously, the massed bands of the Imperial Guard, who had been

playing national airs and popular music at times during the past hour,

formed to the front near by.

For the time being, until after the Emperor should arrive and take

his seat on the throne, the troops on parade, comprising the Army

deputations to receive the Eagles, remained as they had been marshalled

on arrival; arranged in a vast fan-shaped formation round three sides

of the Champ de Mars. The entire Imperial Army of Napoleon stood

represented within that space: Imperial Guard, and Line, Cavalry and

Artillery; the sailors of the Navy; the National Guard,--the \_mise en

scène\_ presenting a tremendous impression of martial power, as all

stood formed up in close order, in their full-dress review-uniforms,

muskets held stiffly at the support, bayonets fixed.

The Imperial procession set off in full State, accompanied by much the

same display of martial pomp that had attended the great Coronation

progress to Notre Dame of three days before. It moved off in a pelting

squall of sleet; but, almost immediately afterwards, as though Heaven

would fain spare the show, within a few minutes of the start, the sleet

and rain ceased and the weather unexpectedly improved.

[Sidenote: THE MAMELUKES LEAD THE WAY]

Foremost of all, the mounted Mamelukes of the Guard came prancing by,

radiant in Oriental garb, their curved scimitars drawn and gleaming;

a hundred swarthy figures in scarlet calpacks swathed round with

white turbans, garbed in vivid green burnous-cloaks well thrown back

to display gold-embroidered scarlet jackets, bright straw-coloured

sashes, and baggy scarlet trousers. Their famous Horse-tail Standard

headed the squadron. Eight hundred stalwart troopers of Napoleon’s pet

regiment, the corps whose uniform he always wore in camp, the Chasseurs

of the Guard, followed immediately after the Mamelukes. An ideal \_corps

d’élite\_ they looked as they rode by, in their bristling busbies of

dark fur topped with waving crimson and green plumes, dark green

double-breasted jackets, and crimson breeches; with crimson pelisses

hanging at the shoulder, fur-trimmed and barred with yellow braid in

hussar style. These two corps led the van of the procession.

The first set of Imperial coaches, with six horses each and outriders,

thereupon came by. They carried mostly State magnificos and grandees

of exalted position at Court. Coach after coach went slowly past at a

dignified pace: eight--nine--ten--eleven--conveyances, all spick and

span with new gilding and varnish. The twelfth coach, beside which

rode a bevy of smart equerries, held the Princesses of the Bonaparte

family: five grown-up ladies and the little daughter of Princess Louis.

It was rather a tight squeeze, for the five Imperial Highnesses were

plump and bulky persons, and had to be wedged closely; they brought

with them too, each lady, several yards of train, brocaded stuff with

stiff edging of gilt-gimp, and thick purple and emerald green velvet

mantling, which had all to be got in and kept from crumpling as much

as possible! What they said to one another has not been recorded--they

were usually free-spoken women with comments for most things ready to

their tongues, like other daughters of the Revolution. At any rate this

is known. They were in white silk dresses, low necked, and, in spite of

their close packing, shivered with the cold, which they felt bitterly.

“We were all,” related a Lady of Honour elsewhere in the procession,

“thinly dressed, as for a heated ball-room, and had only thin Cashmere

shawls to keep our shoulders warm with.”

Then came more soldiers. The immediate escort of the Emperor now

appeared. Sitting erect and stiff in their saddles, the Carabiniers

rode up--the senior cavalry regiment of France--eight hundred picked

horsemen uniformed in Imperial blue and crimson and gold, with helmets

of burnished brass, over which nodded thick tufted crests of crimson

wool. The officers, superb beings adorned with breastplates of gleaming

brass, led the regiment. The Carabiniers claimed to be the only corps

of the Napoleonic Army which could prove continuity with the Old Royal

Army, if not indeed with the historic “Maison du Roi” itself, the

Household Brigade of the Monarchy, owing to a curious oversight at the

Revolution through which the regiment had escaped dispersal.

Then came the Man of the Hour.

[Sidenote: THE IMPERIAL COACH APPEARS]

Napoleon now appeared, in his brand-new Imperial State coach. Eight

noble bays drew it--with harness and trappings of red morocco leather

studded with golden bees. A marvellous vehicle to look at was

Napoleon’s coach, gleaming all over with gilded carved work; its roof

topped by a great golden crown, modelled “after that of Charlemagne,”

as people told one another, upheld by four glistening gilded eagles.

The State coach sparkled all over, looking as if encrusted with

gold; a gleaming mass of carved and gilded decorations, representing

allegorical emblems, heraldic designs, and coats of arms in colour.

Napoleon’s head coachman of the Consulate days, César, sat on the box,

his fat form embedded in the centre of a luxurious hammer-cloth of

scarlet velvet, spangled over with golden bees. Outriders in green and

gold and walking footmen beside the horses added their part; also half

a score of Pages of Honour, hanging on all round at the sides and back

of the coach, in green velvet coats, gold laced down the seams, with

green silk shoulder-knots, scarlet silk breeches and stockings, and

white ostrich-plumes in their jaunty black velvet hats: most of the

lads future officers of the Guard. At either side rode Equerries and

\_Officiers d’Ordonnance\_, in white and gold or pale blue and silver.

To the crowds that lined the streets the State coach was a sight of the

day--the coach, for some, as much as the Emperor. All Paris, of course,

had not been able to find room round the Field of Mars, spacious as

the accommodation there was. The pavements all along the streets from

the Tuileries were packed with a dense crowd, which pressed everywhere

close up behind the double rows of Gendarmes and Imperial Guardsmen

keeping the processional route.

They shouted “Vive l’Empereur!” lustily, for all had a good view of

Napoleon through the great glass windows of the coach; seated inside

on the right, wearing his ostrich-feathered cap of semi-State, a gold

embroidered purple velvet mantle, and the Grand Master’s collar of the

Legion of Honour, sparkling with costly gems.

Josephine, a slender figure in ermine cloak and white silk dress,

sat on Napoleon’s left, and on the front seats sat Joseph and Louis,

side by side--the elder brother sleek and smiling, wrapped up in

a poppy-red cloak as Grand Elector of the Empire; Louis Bonaparte

wearing his blue velvet Constable’s mantle over the brass breastplate

of the Colonel-in-Chief of the Carabiniers, to which rank Napoleon

had specially promoted Louis, with the idea of maintaining an old

tradition of the Monarchy that the titular Commander of the Carabiniers

should always be a Prince of the Blood, “\_Frère du Roi\_.”

[Sidenote: CHIEFS OF THE “MAISON MILITAIRE”]

Napoleon’s Imperial Standard was borne immediately after the State

coach; a crowned eagle heading the staff; the flag a silken tricolor,

richly fringed with gold and bespangled with golden bees.

Four of the Marshals, readily recognised by their scarlet

ostrich-plumes and gold-tipped bâtons of command, attended the

Standard, and, as Colonels-General of the Imperial Guard, led the

Imperial Military Household, the “Maison Militaire de l’Empereur.”

The four were: Davout, titular chief of the Grenadiers of the

Guard; Soult, Colonel-General of the Chasseurs; Bessières, of the

Heavy Cavalry; Mortier, of the Guard Artillery. Close behind them

four other gorgeously brilliant officers of rank rode abreast,

the Colonels-General of the Cavalry of the Army: St. Cyr, of the

Cuirassiers, disdainful and sardonic of mien; stern Baraguay

d’Hilliers, of the Dragoons; good-looking Junot, Colonel-General of the

Hussars; and Napoleon’s son-in-law, the chivalrous Eugène Beauharnais,

Colonel-General of Chasseurs. A brilliant cavalcade of little less

resplendent cavaliers, the Emperor’s aides de camp, all of them

Generals of Division or Brigadiers, rounded up the group.

Another eye-surfeit of gleaming varnish, gilded carvings, and green

liveries continued the pageant: twelve other State coaches, six-horsed

like those in advance; carrying the personal suites of Napoleon

and Josephine and the Princesses, Court Chamberlains and similar

gold-embroidered functionaries, Ladies of the Palace and “Officers of

the Crown.” The procession ended after them; the rear being brought

up by the Mounted Grenadiers of the Guard, strapping troopers in

huge bear-skins--soldiers picked for their height and bearing from

the Cavalry of the Line--and the Gendarmerie d’Elite, who formed the

Imperial palace-guard.

More than half the Imperial Guard--numbering, in 1804, ten thousand

officers and men--lined the streets under arms; detachments of

Grenadiers and Vélites, Foot-Chasseurs, Veterans of the Guard, Marines

of the Guard. Through double rows of these, all standing with presented

arms, the procession took its way, passing from the Tuileries Gardens,

across the Place de Concorde and over the bridge there, to the

Esplanade des Invalides. Yet another thundering Imperial salute from

the twenty old cannons of the Batterie Triomphale greeted Napoleon at

that point; while rows of old soldiers, the maimed veterans of Arcola

and Rivoli and Marengo, shouted themselves hoarse, standing ranged in

front of the Outer Court beside Napoleon’s Venetian trophy, kept there

temporarily, the Lion of St. Mark.

From the Invalides, by way of the Rue de Grenelle, it was not far to

the Military School.

[Sidenote: WITHIN THE MILITARY SCHOOL]

Withindoors at the Ecole Militaire a pause was made in the Governor’s

apartments, which had been sumptuously furnished for the occasion from

the Imperial storerooms of the \_Garde Meuble\_. Napoleon here accepted a

number of selected addresses from the military delegations. One of them

was brought by the regimental deputation of the 4th Chasseurs stationed

at Boulogne. It thanked the Emperor in advance for the new standard he

was presenting to the corps, “trusting that the day is at hand when we

shall be able to contribute towards consolidating the splendour of the

Empire by planting our Eagle on the Tower of London.” The Emperor also

received the congratulations of the Ambassadors and Diplomatic Corps.

Ten hereditary German Princes of the Rhineland, visiting Paris for the

Coronation, attended at the Military School to witness the Presentation

of the Eagles; at their head the Prince-Bishop-Elector of Ratisbon,

Arch-Chancellor of the German Empire, the Margrave of Baden, and the

Princes of Hesse-Darmstadt and Hesse-Homburg. Napoleon and Josephine

after that withdrew to assume their crowns and Imperial regalia and

pass outside to the two thrones prepared for them and standing side by

side in the grand central pavilion in front.

The vast array of “guests of the Emperor,” seated outside, had of

course been long since in their places, awaiting the advent of their

Majesties amid surroundings designed on a scale of lavish magnificence

regardless of cost.

On either hand pavilions and galleries and platforms, canopied and

carpeted, draped and curtained and hung in crimson and gold, decorated

with festoons and banners, and fenced with gilded balustrading, covered

the whole length of the \_façade\_ of the Ecole Militaire fronting the

parade ground. In the centre stood the Imperial Pavilion, beneath

a canopy of crimson silk supported by tall gilded columns. Side

galleries draped, and under awnings led from it right and left to two

other pavilions, at either end of the \_façade\_, similarly adorned in

lavish gorgeousness. Below the galleries extended long stands, sloping

forward to the ground, draped in green and crimson, and packed with

rows of seats five or six deep. Here, partly in the open, sat the

provincial Coronation guests from the Departments: the local prefects

and sub-prefects, procurators, magistrates and syndics, mayors and

councillors, and other municipal functionaries, all in gala-day attire

of every colour, plumes in their hats, and buttons and embroidery all

over their coats. They made a many-hued show in the mass, seen from

the parade ground. The higher State dignitaries had seats under the

canopies of the galleries, and looked yet more decorative. Seated in

the pavilions on cushioned chairs were the Ambassadors and Foreign

Princes, the Senate, Corps Legislatif, and Tribunate, High Court

Judges in flowing robes of flame-coloured silk, and velvet-clad “Grand

Officers of the Empire,” in full-dress all. They looked imposing and

magnificent, but most of them were shivering, with damp bodies and

numbed fingers.

[Sidenote: IN THE IMPERIAL PAVILION]

The sleet had stopped for the time, but after the all-night’s downpour

of rain and snow the seats everywhere were in a sad condition. Canopies

and cushions, curtains, seats, carpets--everything had been drenched

through and swamped during the night. The discomfort, however, was past

helping and had to be borne. The Imperial Pavilion itself indeed had

not escaped a wetting, and in parts it was in little better condition

than the other places. “Only with the greatest diligence,” describes

one of the suite, “had it been possible to keep the thrones dry.”

Napoleon’s throne, with beside it the throne for Josephine, at a

slightly lower elevation, stood at the front of the Imperial Pavilion.

A gilt-framed crimson velvet Chair of State was provided for the

Emperor, with a crowned eagle in gilt stucco perched on the back; made

on the model of Dagobert’s chair on which Napoleon had sat during the

ceremony of the distribution of the Crosses of the Legion of Honour at

Boulogne. As on that day, so now, trophies of captured battle-flags

adorned the back of the Imperial daïs, selected from the two hundred

and odd standards taken in battle by the Armies of Italy and Egypt

which Napoleon had led in person: trophies of Montenotte and Arcola,

of Tagliamento and Lodi, of Rivoli and Castiglione; the red-and-white

banner of the Knights of Malta; the green Horse-tail Standard of the

Beys of Egypt; Austrian standards won by Napoleon at the crowning

triumph of Marengo.

To right and left of the Emperor, on richly decorated chairs of

ceremony, Joseph and Louis Bonaparte and the Princesses were seated.

The Imperial suites in attendance were grouped at the back together

with a cluster of court grandees, filling most of the spacious platform

behind the throne.

In the forefront, at the Emperor’s right hand, stood a splendid galaxy

of stalwart figures--the Marshals of the Empire. They stood forward

prominently. For them that was the day of days. All must see on such

a day the champion warriors of France, the renown of whose victories

had filled the world! The whole eighteen were there--all except one.

Marshal Brune alone was absent; on service out of France as Napoleon’s

Ambassador at Constantinople. The group was completed by the four

“Honorary Marshals”--the veteran Kellermann, the victor of Valmy;

Perignon; Serrurier; and Lefebvre.

[Sidenote: THE LIEUTENANTS OF THE WAR LORD]

Glance for one moment round the main group of thirteen, the chosen

lieutenants of Napoleon the War Lord, as they stand beside their Chief,

with, arrayed in front, the serried columns of the destined victors of

Austerlitz. Next to the Emperor and the Eagles it is they who on this

Day of the Eagles are the principal objects of interest to the general

spectator.

Let the reader for one moment imagine himself on the Imperial Pavilion,

with at his side a convenient friend who knows everybody, to point the

marshals out.

That short, spare, low-browed, swarthy, Italian-faced man, with crafty,

pitiless eyes, is Masséna--“L’Enfant chéri de la Victoire,” as Napoleon

himself hailed him on the battlefield; the very ablest undoubtedly of

all the Marshals. He knows it too. When the list of the Marshals first

came out, a friend called on Masséna to know if it was true that he

was one, and to congratulate him. “Oh yes, thank you,” replied Masséna

in an icy tone, puckering up his dark face with a sour look, “I am

one; \_one of fourteen\_!” He’s Italian in blood and breeding, and in

his tricky ways; every point about him: but he’d give his soul to be a

Frenchman! “Massène” is what he is always trying to get people to call

him. And the airs and self-importance he assumes--though only like most

of the others in that, indeed--ever since he became “Monseigneur le

Maréchal” and has had the honour of being addressed as “Mon Cousin”

by the Emperor! Just think of it! In the old days, behind the counter

of that little olive-oil and dried-fruit shop up a narrow, smelly back

street at Antibes, plain “Citoyen André” was good enough! Just look at

that thin, pouting chest, gleaming all over with gold embroidery, with

the broad crimson riband of the Legion of Honour slanting across it,

and the aggressive tilt of his ostrich-plumed hat! Imagine all that

being once upon a time just a cabin-boy on a Marseilles to Leghorn

coaster, half-starved and sworn at and cuffed and kicked about by a

curmudgeonly \_padrone\_! Then fancy it a sneaking smuggler, chevied

about, and crouching along to keep out of carbine shot of the Nice

\_douaniers\_! After that Sergeant Masséna of the late King’s \_Royal

Italien\_ regiment of the Line! And so to the bâton.

They are most of them rather \_tête montée\_ just now, with their

exaltation spick and span on them, these demi-gods of war of ours! Just

see them in the field, or on the march; away from the Emperor. They

stalk ahead in solitary grandeur; each with his own \_pas seul\_, keeping

the lesser creation at arms’ length, wrapped up in his own dignified

importance. Yet only six months since their lofty Excellencies were

mere generals of division, “Citoyen Général” this or that, each one;

just units among a hundred and twenty odd others! Nowadays, on the

march, your Marshal rides by himself, forty yards ahead of everybody;

his staff have to tail off well in rear and keep back! M. le Maréchal

doesn’t deign to open his lips, except to give an order. He lives by

himself: nobody now is good enough to ask to dinner, except perhaps

another marshal! No off-duty pleasantries nowadays; no more \_bon

camaraderie\_; no more telling of Palais-Royal stories, as it used

to be; no more cracking of jokes beside the bivouac fire. You might

as well expect a bishop to have a game of marbles! Let a former

brother-officer \_tutoyer\_ a marshal! Poor fellow! Let him try, if he

wants to know what a paralysing, rasping, cold-blooded snub is, to get

a flattening backhander he’ll remember as long as he wears the uniform.

[Sidenote: TWO FAMOUS HARD FIGHTERS]

That tall, bull-necked, heavy-featured man is Augereau; “gros comme

un tambour-major”; absolutely fearless under fire, kind-hearted to

those he takes a fancy to, they say, but ordinarily a coarse-tongued

swashbuckler, with barrack-room manners. There too is Lannes, that

keen-eyed, short man, holding his head as if he had a crick in his

neck! He has one, a permanent one, the result of a bullet under the jaw

from a British marine’s musket in the trenches at Acre. A hot-tempered,

fiery, devil-may-care fellow is Lannes; but as cold as ice on the

battlefield when things look like going wrong! Among friends,

chivalrous and generous-hearted to a degree, his men worship Lannes;

“the Roland of the Grand Army,” some call him. That is Moncey: and that

very tall and erect, dry, rather dense-looking, hawk-nosed marshal with

the shaggy eyebrows, Mortier. Mark Bernadotte there, that shifty-eyed

Gascon with a sharp nose and thick hair; of medium height,--nobody

really trusts him. An ingrained Jacobin--strip his arm and you will

find tattooed on it, indelibly, for life, “Mort aux rois”--and a

schemer, Napoleon named him a Marshal for political reasons mainly;

although, no doubt, he has the same soldier-qualifications as the

rest; has won a pitched battle or taken two fortresses. A cunning,

plausible fellow is Bernadotte; with ready smile and a smooth tongue.

He calls everybody “Mon ami” whether he is talking to a brigadier or

a bugler. “Que diable fait il dans cette galère?” say a good many

people of the Commander of the First Army Corps. Over yonder stands

Bessières, Murat’s great friend; a gentlemanly enough fellow, but at

times thick-headed, hardly of the mental calibre of his confrères. Yet

Bessières is an ideal leader of Horse on the battlefield; as reckless

as a lion at bay: you should see him head a charge sword in hand! One

of Napoleon’s pets is he and the only man in the Army who sticks to his

queue. Bessières flatly refused to cut it off when the order was given

last June for everybody to copy “Le petit tondu” (“The little shorn

one”), as the men call the Emperor, and it hangs halfway down his back.

That dark, sleek-faced, heavy-eyed man is Jourdan, Commander-in-Chief

once of the Army of the Revolution. “The Anvil,” some call him, he has

been so often soundly beaten. But, all the same, he was too popular

with the Army for Napoleon to pass him over. Jourdan it was who

invented the conscription system. He started in life as a linen-draper

at Grenoble. There is of course, too, Brune, who isn’t here to-day: but

he doesn’t count for much. A minor-poet and a journalist was he once

upon a time. He’s another of the clever-tongued Jacobins the Emperor

gave the bâton to as a sop.

[Sidenote: NAPOLEON’S RIGHT-HAND MAN]

Look near the Emperor, at that neat athletic figure, of middle height:

that is “Old Berthier.” He is from ten to fifteen years older than most

of the other marshals; or, in fact, than the Emperor himself. Berthier,

in fact, is old enough to have been a captain in the Army of the

\_ancien régime\_, and can remember how he first smelt powder fighting

under Lafayette and Washington against the British in America. He was a

staff officer when Napoleon first came to the Ecole Militaire here from

Brienne, as a boy gentleman-cadet. A heaven-born Chief of the Staff is

Marshal Berthier, and the Emperor without him in a campaign would be

like a man without his right hand. Every detail goes like clockwork

with Berthier at the head of the Etat-Major.

You should see the two of them on campaign, working together in the

Quartier-Général. Napoleon will be sprawling on his stomach at full

length over a huge set of maps which cover, spread out, nearly the

whole floor of the tent; an open pair of compasses in his hand, a box

of pins with little paper flag-heads, red, blue, yellow, green, at one

side, some of them already stuck over the map marking the positions

of the different corps and of the enemy. He has the compasses set to

scale, to mark off some seventeen to twenty miles, which means from

twenty-two to twenty-five miles of road, taking into account the

windings. To and fro he twists and turns the compasses like lightning

and decides in an instant the marches for each column to arrive at

the desired point, all timed exactly to the very day and hour with an

astonishing certainty and precision. He calls out his instructions

in half a dozen words or so, sharply snapped out, for Berthier, who

all the time is standing near, bending down at Napoleon’s shoulder,

notebook and pencil in hand, to take down. Old Berthier has a veritable

instinct for understanding what the Emperor means. He can interpret the

smallest grunt Napoleon makes. He can spin out three or four broken

ejaculations into detailed orders for an Army Corps, all worked out

with absolute clearness, in beautiful language. It is amazing how he

does it, but he does do it. A staff officer, or else Bacler d’Albe, the

Imperial Military Cartographer, the officer in charge of the maps, it

may be, is all the while also kneeling by the pin-box, and has the pins

of the right colour out and stuck in the maps as fast as the Emperor

wants them. The instant the Emperor is satisfied, Berthier is off, and

with the secretaries at work in his own quarters drafting the orders.

Then, before you know well where you are, a dozen \_estafettes\_ are

galloping all over the country with the orders--in the case of a very

important order sometimes three or four staff officers each take a

copy, to ride by different routes so as to minimise the risk of delay

or capture. That is the working of Berthier’s system, and there is not

often a miscarriage or serious hitch in the delivery.

[Sidenote: MARSHALL SOULT]

And mark Soult, the coming man of the Marshals when he gets his chance;

a wary old dog-fox for an enemy to tackle. A sergeant of infantry in

the old “Royal Regiment” of former days, the old 13th of the Line, then

a drill-instructor of Volunteers, now he is at the head of the Army

at Boulogne for the descent on England. Hardly even the Emperor knows

more about tactics than Soult. Note how self-possessed and masterful

he looks, so cold and impassive of demeanour. Those eyes that seem to

pierce through you, those clear-cut aquiline features, that face like

a mask of bronze, show the character of the man. You wouldn’t think

though, to see his fine soldier-like figure as he stands there, a

warrior born to look at, that Soult is not only lame from a fall from

his horse years ago, but has limped from his birth, from a club-foot.

That bald-headed marshal over there is Marshal Davout, a dashing

subaltern of Dragoons once in the Old Royal Army. A fine tactician

for a hot place is Davout; and when the fight has been won, no leader

so harsh and pitiless to the vanquished enemy. He wears spectacles on

service: he can hardly see ten yards in front of his big nose. The

ladies are very fond of Davout; he waltzes so nicely.

And that other there is Marshal Ney; “the Indefatigable” is the

Army’s name for him. He never spares himself, nor the enemy, on the

battlefield; but after the last shot there is no more generous victor

than Marshal Ney. For sheer dogged pluck against odds, for simply

marvellous intrepidity, the world cannot match Ney. Stalwart and

square-shouldered, he carries himself with all the jaunty assurance of

manner you would expect in perhaps the most dashing leader of hussars

the Army of France has known. He is an Alsatian, born by the Rhine; a

pleasant-faced man, with frank grey eyes, curly red hair over a broad

open forehead. “Red Michael” is one of the soldiers’ names for Ney; and

there is not one of the Marshals for whom his men would do more.

[Sidenote: THE EAGLES AWAIT NAPOLEON]

Such, if it may be permitted to describe them in this way, is something

of what the Marshals of Napoleon looked like on the day of the Eagle

presentation on the Field of Mars. All eyes were turned on the Marshals

as they stood there beside Napoleon; a brilliant array of soldierly

figures in their red ostrich-plumed cocked hats, richly laced uniforms,

gleaming brass-bound sword-scabbards and high jack-boots with clanking

brass spurs.

From the foot of the throne a grand staircase led down to the parade

ground, widening out with a curving sweep to either side at the foot.

It terminated there with, flanking the lower steps, two gilded statues,

designed to represent, the one, “France granting Peace,” the other,

“France making War.” From top to bottom of the stairs and extending

at the foot to right and left along either side, stood in rows the

colonels of the regiments on parade, together with the senior officers

of the National Guard, all awaiting the Emperor’s appearance on the

throne. Each bore the new Eagle standard to be presented to his own

corps. All were at their posts as the appointed moment neared, while at

the same time Murat and his attendant cavalcade of brilliantly bedecked

horsemen closed in and formed up in front, so as immediately to face

Napoleon.

On either hand of Murat were ranked the massed bands of the Imperial

Guard, flanked by two solid phalanxes of drummers, each a thousand

strong. Near by these were drawn up on horseback, on one side the

officers of the Head Quarters Staff at the War Office, on the other,

the staff officers of the army corps of the Marshals.

Napoleon and Josephine made their entry into the Grand Pavilion

heralded by a procession, the bands of the Guard playing the Coronation

March. Then, to the accompaniment of three successive shouts of “Vive

l’Empereur!” from the soldiers--the formal greeting to Napoleon

on parade, in accordance with Army regulation--the Emperor seated

himself on the throne. He was in full Imperial garb, wearing his

Imperial mantle of rich crimson velvet studded with golden bees, and

the Imperial crown, a golden laurel chaplet “after Charlemagne.” In

his right hand he bore the Imperial sceptre, a tall silver-gilt wand

with an eagle surmounting it, also designed, as they said, “after

Charlemagne.”

Seating himself with Josephine at his side, in her State robes and with

a magnificent crown of diamonds on her head, Napoleon gave the order

for the proceedings to begin.

Murat, as Governor of Paris, in immediate command of the parade, raised

his glittering marshal’s bâton. The bands of the Guard ceased playing

abruptly. The next moment the two thousand infantry drums began to

beat. It was the appointed signal for the detachments to advance and

form up in front of the throne.

At once, at the first roll of the drums, the soldiers ranged round the

ground began to move.

Wheeling some, counter-marching others, here rapidly doubling, there

marking time--looking, indeed, for the moment, at first, in the mass,

to the untrained eye of the non-military spectator like a swarming

ant-heap in motion and inextricably intermingled--like magic all

suddenly appeared in order, a series of columns, the heads of which,

arrayed at regular intervals, were in unison converging concentrically

towards the foot of the grand staircase in front of the throne. A dozen

paces in rear of where Murat stood all halted as one man. There was a

quick movement of bayonets as arms were shouldered; the action making a

glint of flashing steel in spite of the dull grey light overhead.

[Sidenote: NAPOLEON FACES THE PARADE]

Every sound was hushed as Napoleon rose to his feet. He faced the

wide-spreading multitude and gazed silently over them for a moment;

standing well forward where all might see him. Then he addressed the

parade in strong vibrant tones which rang out clear and resonant over

the whole assembly like a trumpet-note. In words that seemed to thrill

with intensified energy he called on the soldiers before him, on

behalf of themselves and their absent comrades, to take the oath of

devotion to the Eagles.

“Soldiers!” he began, his right arm outstretched with an impassioned

gesture towards the Eagles, whose bearers held them stiffly erect, all

glancing and gleaming like polished gold, the bright-hued silken flags

unfurled, “behold your standards! These Eagles to you shall ever be

your rallying-point. Wherever your Emperor shall deem it needful for

the defence of his throne and his people, there shall they be seen!”

He paused. Then raising his right hand in the air with a swift

strenuous movement Napoleon pronounced the oath:

“You swear to sacrifice your lives in their defence: to maintain them

by your courage ever in the path of Victory! You swear it?”

The vast gathering stood as though spellbound. For one instant all

remained motionless and silent, held down as it were by overmastering

emotion.

Then, all together, with one accord, the soldiers found their voices.

With a thundering shout that seemed to shake the air, the Army made its

response, answering back in one deep chorus:

[Sidenote: “WE SWEAR IT! WE SWEAR IT!”]

“\_Nous le jurons!\_”--“We swear it!”

One and all enthusiastically re-echoed the words; while the colonels

excitedly brandished and waved aloft the Eagles. In a frenzy of martial

ardour the entire assembly, at the top of their voices, again and

again declaimed, “We swear it! We swear it!” A wild prolonged outburst

of cheering followed, and exuberant shouts of “Vive l’Empereur!”

Before the cheering had abated, the drums broke in again. The sharp

clash and rattle recalled all to order instantly. Again a dead silence

fell over the great host, standing now with recovered arms.

Up once more went Murat’s marshal’s bâton. The next moment the

dense-set columns were standing stock-still like rows of statues, with

arms at the shoulder.

Napoleon resumed his seat on the throne, and as he did so yet once more

a wave of enthusiasm swept over the vast array. Redoubled shouts of

“Vive l’Empereur!” burst wildly forth, the soldiers pulling off their

hats or helmets, and hoisting them on the points of their bayonets,

excitedly waving them, while they shouted themselves breathless.

Again the drums rolled, and again order was restored. And now the

supreme act of the drama opened--the formal presentation of each Eagle

to its own regimental deputation.

Forthwith the wide-fronted columns, breaking swiftly into

quarter-column formation, began to move, section by section, in turn.

Rapidly, and, as it almost seemed, automatically, they resumed their

first formation, extending round the Field of Mars on three sides.

From front to rear the quarter-columns took up a full mile and

three-quarters. Ranked in close order, the long-drawn-out array of

troops on that set off, to a stately march from the bands of the Guard,

to pass along the front of the Military School, before the flanking

pavilion, and galleries and stands. So, in due course, all in turn came

opposite to the foot of the great stairway ascending to the throne.

Each section, as it came in front of the steps, made a pause. The

Colonels at the same moment were passing in file before Napoleon. Each

in turn inclined the Eagle that he bore towards the Emperor. He held

the staff at an angle of forty-five degrees--the regulation method of

salute, in accordance with an Imperial order issued in the previous

July, when the adoption of the Eagle as the Army standard was first

announced. Napoleon on his side, with his ungloved right hand, just

touched each Eagle. The Colonels, then, saluting, turned, one after

the other, to descend the stairs. At the foot of the stairway each

delivered over the Eagle to the standard-bearer of his regiment, who,

together with the deputation, was at the spot to receive it.[5]

[Sidenote: THE ONLY EXISTING NAVAL EAGLE]

With the Eagles in their charge the regimental parties moved on.

Passing in front of the stands and pavilions beyond, all wheeled

there, to pass again round the arena of the Field of Mars, until they

had reached their former stations, and halted, all ranged in the order

in which they had taken post at their first arrival.

[Sidenote: THE EAGLE OF THE IRISH LEGION]

There remained after that the grand \_finale\_. The March Past of

the Eagle detachments before Napoleon now came on, designed as the

consummation of the day’s doings.

In connection with that, however, there was an unfortunate incident.

On the Field of Mars were displayed also the old Army colours of the

Consulate, which, as has been said, had been brought to Paris at the

order of the War Minister by the regimental deputations. Paraded

together with the new Eagles they helped to render the scene the more

striking; but their presence led to an unforeseen complication, and in

the end a deplorable \_contretemps\_.

The standard-bearers who had received the Eagles were each, in

addition, still carrying the old regimental flag. They had to

carry both. No instructions had been given out--by oversight, most

probably--as to the giving up of the old flags, or what was to be done

with them.

[Sidenote: ALL DID NOT WANT THE EAGLES]

It may have been that Napoleon desired that the standards of the

Consulate and the Eagles of the Empire should be displayed together

on that day. None knew better than he the deep attachment of the

older men in the ranks for their former battle-flags. Some of the old

soldiers, indeed, even there on the Field of Mars, as we are told, were

unable to restrain their feelings at the idea of having to part that

day from their old colours. “More than one tear was shed,” relates an

officer, “amidst all the cheering and shouts of ‘Vive l’Empereur!’”

Enthusiastically as most of the soldiers might welcome the new Eagles

in the presence of the Emperor, all did not desire to part with

colours which had led through the battle-smoke on many a victorious

field of the past, even in exchange for the glittering “Cou-cous,” as

barrack-room slang had already dubbed Napoleon’s Eagles, giving them in

advance a soldier’s nickname that stuck to them as long as the Army of

the Empire lasted.

Both sets of standards were carried in the march past, which proceeded

without incident to a certain point.

It was an effective display of the lusty manhood of France, of the

pick of the Grand Army in its prime; not yet made \_chair au canon\_

to gratify the ambition of one man. A curious commingling, too, of

fighting costumes did the review present for the general spectators;

those of yesterday side by side with those of the coming time.

Three-fourths of the soldiers went by wearing the stiff Republican

garb of the expiring \_régime\_, as adopted hastily at the outset of

the Revolution: the long-skirted coat, cut after the old Royal Army

fashion, but blue in colour instead of white, and with white lapels

and turn-backs; long-flapped white waistcoats, white breeches, and

high black-cloth gaiters above the knee, such as their ancestors

had worn in the days of Marshal Saxe; the old-style big cocked hat,

worn cross-wise, or “en bataille,” as the soldiers called it, with

a flaunting tricolor cockade in front. The new Napoleonic style was

represented by the Imperial Guard and Oudinot’s Grenadier Division from

Arras and the Light Infantry battalions, whose turn out in smartly cut

coatees faced with red and green, with the tall broad-topped shakos

pictures of the time make us familiar with as the normal presentment of

the soldiers of the Empire, attracted special attention.[6]

During the March Past, Frimaire suddenly reasserted itself, and brought

about the regrettable incident that was to wind up the day.

The parade was three parts through, when, all of a sudden, a tremendous

downpour of cold rain set in, discomfiting and scattering all who

were looking on. With the drenching effect of a shower-bath the rain

commenced to pour down in torrents, causing an immediate stampede

among the general public. The rearmost columns of the soldiers had to

pass before empty benches, tramping along stolidly through the mud,

“splashing ankle-deep through a sea of mud,” as an officer put it.

[Sidenote: THE SPECTATORS DISAPPEAR]

The spectators one and all disappeared. The immense crowd of sightseers

left the benches on the embankment round the Champ de Mars, and fled

home \_en masse\_. The seat-holders on the open stands in front of the

Ecole Militaire scurried off in like manner. The occupants of the

pavilions and galleries, half drowned by the water that streamed down

on them through the awnings, quitted their places in haste to seek

shelter within the building. The downpour saturated the canopy of the

Imperial Pavilion and dripped through. It compelled Josephine to get up

from her throne and hurry indoors. The Princesses promptly followed the

Empress’s example, all except one--Napoleon’s youngest sister, Caroline

Murat. Caroline sat the March Past out to the end, together, of course,

with Napoleon himself and the Marshals, and those Court officials who

had to stay where they were. Soaked through, she smilingly remarked

that she was “accustoming herself to endure the inconveniences

inseparable from a throne!”

Then, at the close of the review, came the \_contretemps\_.

After the last Eagle had gone past the throne, when Napoleon had left

on his way back to the Tuileries, as the troops were moving off the

ground to return to their quarters, unanticipated trouble suddenly

arose in connection with the old flags. What happened may best,

perhaps, be described in the words of an eye-witness, a General present

on the Field of Mars, Baron Thiébault:

“Immediately after the Emperor had gone and the seats all round

were empty, finding it tiresome to be loaded with the double set

of standards, all the more so, no doubt, as it was raining, the

standard-bearers apparently could think of nothing better than to rid

themselves of the superseded flags. They began everywhere to throw them

down, that is, to drop them where they stood in the mud. There they

were trampled under foot by the soldiers as they passed along on their

way back to quarters.”

The outrage scandalised the older soldiers, and very nearly brought

about a mutiny among some of them.

“Indignant,” to continue in General Thiébault’s words, “at such an

outrage to national emblems which the Army had been honouring and

defending for thirteen years past, many of the men in the regiments

began to grumble and make angry protestations. Presently oaths and

violent imprecations burst out on all sides; and then some of the

grenadiers became mutinous and defiant. They declared that they

would go back, regardless of the consequences, and forcibly recover

possession of the old colours.”

[Sidenote: THE SITUATION JUST SAVED]

The situation speedily became so threatening that General Thiébault

hastened off to warn Murat of what was happening. As he went he came

across one of the adjutants of the Commandant of the Military School.

On the spur of the moment he gave him orders to get together what men

he could of the party who had been keeping the parade ground. Of these

Thiébault took personal charge and sent them round at once to collect

the thrown-down colours and carry them inside the Ecole Militaire.

Apparently that satisfied the soldiers--anxious, most of them, to get

out of the wet as soon as possible.

General Thiébault tried after that to find Murat, intending to report

to him; but Murat had by then left the Field of Mars. In the end the

General decided, as perhaps the wisest course, to refrain from saying

anything; not to take official notice of what had happened. After all

he was not on duty at the parade; he was only in Paris as an invited

guest at the Coronation festivities. Nobody, as a fact, said a word

of the affair. By the authorities all reference to it seems purposely

to have been hushed up. Not a hint of anything of the sort appeared

in the \_Moniteur\_, which published a fairly full report of the day’s

proceedings; not a word in any of the other Parisian papers.

For the soldiers a dinner of double rations at the Emperor’s expense

wound up the Day of the Eagles; for the great personages there was

“a banquet at the Tuileries, at which the Pope and the Emperor sat

side by side at the same table, arrayed in their Pontifical and

Imperial insignia and waited upon by the Grand Officers of the Crown.”

Afterwards, without delaying in the capital, the deputations set off

on their return to rejoin their regiments. Their arrival at their

various destinations was celebrated everywhere, by Imperial order, by

a full-dress parade and State reception of the Eagle by each corps;

the occasion being further treated as a fête-day and opportunity for a

general carousal in camp or garrison. At Boulogne the regiments of the

“Army of England” took over their Eagles at a grand review on December

23, Marshal Soult presiding over the ceremony.

[Sidenote: THE CLOSE OF THE DAY]

The old standards of the Consulate, some bearing on them the

battle-scars of Marengo and Hohenlinden, remained where General

Thiébault’s assistants had left them stacked, leaning up against the

wall in one of the corridors of the Military School, until they were

carted off in artillery tumbrils to the central dépôt at Vincennes.

There, on New Year’s Day of 1805, they were officially made away with;

burned to ashes in the presence of an ordnance department official told

off to certify to their complete destruction. That was the authorised

method in France of disposing of the standards of a discredited

\_régime\_; but all the same it was a hard fate for national emblems that

had waved victoriously over so many a hard-fought field.

Such were the principal scenes and incidents of the Day of the Field of

Mars when Napoleon presented the Eagles of the Empire to the Soldiers

of the Grand Army.

CHAPTER III

IN THE FIRST CAMPAIGN:--

UNDER FIRE WITH MARSHAL NEY

The Eagles made their \_début\_ on the battlefield amid a blaze of glory.

Within a twelvemonth of the Field of Mars they had swooped irresistibly

across half the Continent, leading forward victoriously through the

cannon-smoke in combat after combat, to achieve the crowning triumphs

of Ulm and Austerlitz. Within the twelvemonth they witnessed the

overwhelming defeat of more than 200,000 foes, the capture of 500

cannon, while 120 standards had been paraded before them as spoils of

victory.

In the first fortnight of September 1805, Austria and Russia, as the

protagonists in Pitt’s great European Coalition against Napoleon,

declared war on France, and an army of 80,000 Austrians traversed

Bavaria in hot haste, to take post at Ulm by the Danube, on the

frontiers of Würtemberg. There they proposed to hold Napoleon in check,

until their Russian allies, whose advance by forced marches through

Poland had already begun, could join hands with them. After that they

would press forward in resistless force to cross the Rhine and invade

France.

[Sidenote: NAPOLEON’S OPENING MOVE]

But Napoleon was beforehand with them from the outset. Within

twenty-four hours of the ultimatum reaching his hands he had made the

opening move in the campaign: the lion, whose skin had been sold, had

crouched for the fatal spring.

General Mack, the Austrian Commander-in-chief, entered Bavaria on

September 8. On September 1 Napoleon’s “Army of the Ocean” had struck

its tents in Boulogne camp and started on its way, with plans laid that

ensured Mack’s overthrow. A hundred and eighty thousand soldiers were

hastening along every high-road through Hanover, Holland, and Flanders,

and in eastern France, towards the great plain of central Bavaria, to

deal the Austrians the heaviest and most resounding blow ever yet dealt

to a modern army.

Napoleon, screening his movement by means of Murat’s cavalry, sent

ahead on a wide front to occupy the attention of the Austrian outposts,

made a bold sweep right round Mack’s right flank. Before the Austrian

general had any suspicion that there was a single Frenchman on that

side of him, the entire French army had passed the Danube in his rear,

and had blocked the great highway from Vienna. Napoleon at the first

move had cut the Austrian line of communication with their base. He

had barred the only route by which the Russians could approach to

Mack’s assistance.

That done, swiftly and successfully, while Mack, startled and utterly

staggered at the sudden appearance of the enemy in his rear, was

hurriedly facing about in confusion, to try to hold his ground,

Napoleon struck at him hard. He hurled attack after attack in force

on the Austrian flanking divisions, on both wings of Mack’s army, and

broke them up. Taking thousands of prisoners and many guns, he drove

the wreck, a disorganised mass of scared and helpless battalions,

in rout to the walls of Ulm itself. Penned in there, ringed round

by 100,000 French bayonets, with the French artillery pouring shot

and shell into the doomed fortress from commanding heights within

short range, General Mack, left now with barely 30,000 men, after a

despairing interview with Napoleon, was terrorised into immediate

surrender at discretion.

Amid such scenes did the Eagles of the Field of Mars undergo their

baptism of fire. Ever in the forefront under fire, brilliantly, time

and again, did those who bore them do their duty.

It was round the Eagles of Marshal Ney’s corps, “the Fighting Sixth,”

that the fiercest contests of the campaign centred; and on every

occasion they gained honour.

In the sharp brush at the bridge across the Danube at Reisenburg, near

the small town of Günsburg, on October 8, one of the opening encounters

of the campaign, the Eagle of the 59th of the Line showed the way to

victory. The Austrians, whom Ney surprised on the south side or right

bank, retreating as the French approached, had partially broken down

the bridge before Ney’s men could reach the place.

[Sidenote: AT THE BRIDGE OF GÜNSBURG]

The Danube flows wide and deep at Reisenburg, and there was no other

means of getting over.

Ney had explicit orders from Napoleon to cross over and occupy

Günsburg, and to hold the river passage. As the 59th, who led the

attack, got to the bridge, a long and narrow wooden structure, the

Austrian sappers were hard at work destroying it; covered by a

rearguard brigade of infantry and artillery. The planking had been

ripped away, but most of the bridge framework and supporting beams

still stood. The 59th came up and opened fire, compelling the sappers

to withdraw. Then a hasty effort was made by the pioneers of the

regiment under fire to repair part of the bridge. They made a way

across with planks wide enough for a few men to scramble over together.

“In places only one man could get across at a time.”

At once the 59th rushed forward cheering, but the concentrated Austrian

fire from the other side was too hot to face. They were beaten back

three times, the dead and wounded falling into the rushing stream

below. But were they not the 59th? No other of the regiments following

them in rear should have the honour of being the first to make the

passage! The Eagle-bearer of the 59th, weaving the Eagle aloft,

headed a fourth attack; with Colonel Gerard Lacuée, the colonel of

the regiment, a distinguished officer and an Honorary A.D.C. to the

Emperor, beside him. The two led out in front, regardless of the storm

of bullets round them. Colonel Lacuée fell mortally wounded. An officer

ran forward and carried the Colonel back to die on the river-bank, but

the Eagle-bearer went on. “Soldiers,” the brave fellow stopped for an

instant to turn round and shout back to his comrades, “your Eagle goes

forward! I shall carry it across alone!” The men of the 59th, thrown

into a frenzy at the sight of their Eagle’s peril, rallied instantly to

follow. The four leading companies held on bravely and got across. Then

they charged the Austrians at the point of the bayonet and drove them

back into the village. That, though, was not all. Fresh Austrians had

turned back to help their rearguard troops. Firing from the river-bank

on either side of the village, for a time they stopped the other

French regiments from crossing the bridge after the 59th. Austrian

dragoons and infantry at the same time charged the gallant regiment,

entirely isolated now on that side of the river. But they could not

break the 59th. Forming square, the two battalions, with their Eagles

held on high as rallying-centres, kept a host of foes at bay. Three

fierce Austrian charges did they beat off--and then help arrived.

A second regiment, the 50th, had by then managed to get across the

bridge. The two regiments maintained themselves there all the afternoon

until nightfall and then bivouacked on the ground they had won until

morning, “passing an anxious time, under arms, unable to light a fire.

Fortunately, in the dark the Austrians did not realise our small

numbers. They were more anxious to cover their own retreat.” Before

daylight the Austrians fell back and the passage of the Danube was won.

There was another morning’s work on October 11.

[Sidenote: THE EAGLES AT HASLACH]

At Haslach, on the north bank of the Danube, not far from Ulm, a

brigade of Dupont’s Division of Ney’s corps, advancing on that side

on its own account, was suddenly set on by five times its number of

Austrians. The brigade was made up of three regiments: the 9me Légère

(or 9th Light Infantry), the 32nd, and the 69th. They stumbled, as it

were, suddenly on the Austrians, whereupon General Dupont, who was

riding with the brigade, on the opposite side of the river from the

rest of his troops, “judging that if he fell back it would betray

his weakness,” made a dash at the enemy. His daring deceived the

Austrians, who believed that he was the advanced guard of a large force

close behind. They held back at first and awaited attack. Throwing

the 32nd into Haslach to hold the village, Dupont boldly charged with

the two other regiments, and at the first onset made 1,500 prisoners,

numbers equal to a quarter of his total force. The Austrians, however,

rallied and returned to the fight. They brought up reinforcements and

entrenched themselves in the village of Jüningen, near by, where again

Dupont attacked them. Five times did the 9th Light Infantry take and

retake Jüningen at the point of the bayonet, their two battalion Eagles

heading the attack each time. No fewer than six officers, bearing the

Eagles in turn, fell in the fight. “Ces corps ne devaient étonner de

rien,” commented Napoleon in praising Dupont and his men.

At Elchingen, a village in the immediate neighbourhood of Ulm, the

scene of the brilliant victory by which Marshal Ney won his title of

Due d’Elchingen, the Eagles of two regiments won distinction, through

the individual heroism of the officers who, holding them on high,--“En

haut l’Aigle!” was the charging cry--led the onset that stormed the

place.[7]

[Sidenote: THE EAGLES STORM ELCHINGEN]

Ney headed the 6th Light Infantry personally, “in full uniform and

ablaze with decorations, offering a splendid target to the enemy.” Ney

led the 6th with the Eagle of the First Battalion carried close at

his side. Fifteen thousand Austrians with forty guns held Elchingen,

and the post is described as being “one of the strongest positions

that could be imagined.” The village itself, a large place, consisted

of “successive piles of stone houses, intersected at right angles

by streets, rising in the form of an amphitheatre from the banks of

the Danube to a large convent which crowns the summit of the ascent.

All the exposed points on heights were lined with artillery; all the

windows filled with musketeers.” The village was on the north bank, and

the river had to be crossed to get to it.

First the gallant 6th Light Infantry stormed the bridge. It had been

partly destroyed by the Austrians on the day before, and its tottering

arches were now swept by cannon-balls, plunging down from batteries on

the heights in rear, and a tornado of bullets from sharpshooters in the

houses near the river-side. Fighting their way forward step by step,

the 6me Légère went on. Their Eagle headed the advance. Its bearer was

wounded, but he proudly brandished on high the standard; its silken

flag torn to tatters by bullets, and with one wing of the Eagle broken

by a shot. With the 6th fought the 69th of the Line. The two regiments

forced their way along the steep crooked main street up hill, fired

down on furiously meanwhile from the windows. Parties of men at times

entered the houses at the sides and fought the enemy inside bayonet to

bayonet, from floor to floor. The 6th and the 69th pressed forward,

broke down the enemy’s resistance, and carried Elchingen. The Austrians

finally, after a gallant attempt to hold out in the convent on the

hilltop, abandoned it as fresh French troops came up from across the

river.

On the battlefield, when the fight was over, Napoleon, with the

Imperial staff round him, publicly congratulated Marshal Ney (he named

him later “Duc D’Elchingen”) in the presence of the 6th Light Infantry

and the 69th, specially paraded at the spot for the occasion.

[Sidenote: THE EAGLES AT ULM]

The Eagles of Ney, again, were foremost at the winning of the final

fight at Ulm. They led the furious onrush that stormed the steep

heights of Michelsberg and Les Tuileries, the key of the last Austrian

position. Thence Napoleon looked down directly into the fortress; and

within an hour of Ney’s brilliant final feat the French shells, from

batteries, quickly galloped up to the heights, were bursting in Ulm,

carrying terror and death into every quarter of the city.

On that came the surrender of General Mack. The curtain next rises on

the intensely dramatic Fifth Act of the tragedy, the march out of the

Austrians to lay down their arms.

In that display the Eagles had their allotted place. Before them,

brought forward and prominently paraded, each Eagle in advance of its

own corps in line, with the whole Grand Army ranged in battle order as

spectators of the scene, the standards of the vanquished foe defiled

out of the gates of Ulm, and were laid down on the ground in formal

token of surrender.

Napoleon proved himself at Ulm a born stage-manager.

Hardly ever before, never in modern war, had such a spectacle been

witnessed as that presented on that chill and cheerless October Sunday

forenoon, October 20, 1805, in the heart of central Germany, beside the

banks of the rushing Danube, roaring past, a yellow foaming torrent

after weeks of autumn rain, amid pine-clad summits extending far and

wide on either hand.

Along the lower slopes of the high ground to the north and east of

Ulm, drawn up in lines and columns over a wide semi-circle, stood the

victorious army; massed round, as it were, in a vast amphitheatre. They

formed up by army corps, and took post grim and silent, drawn up in

battle array, with muskets loaded and bayonets fixed. The Cavalry with

sabres drawn were on one side; the Infantry on the other, facing them

and leaving a space between, along which the Austrians were to pass.

Fifty loaded cannon, in line along one ridge, pointed down on the city.

In front, towards the river, there rose a small knoll, an outlying spur

of rock. On that Napoleon took his station beside a blazing watchfire

which marked the spot from far. Accompanying him were most of the

marshals and the assembled Etat-Major of the Grand Army, a numerous and

brilliant gathering. Immediately in rear stood massed the 10,000 men of

the Imperial Guard.

Two army corps, a little way from the rest, had a special post of

honour. They were drawn up at the end of the wide semi-circle of the

main army nearest the Augsburg gate of Ulm; immediately where the

defilading column of captives would present themselves before passing

Napoleon to lay down their arms and standards. The two corps were: that

on the right, Ney’s, the Sixth Army Corps, the heroes of the day \_par

excellence\_; on the left, the Second Corps, Marmont’s, who had been

doing notable work elsewhere in the neighbourhood of Ulm. Ney, with his

personal staff beside him, was on horseback in front of the centre of

his corps; Marmont had his post in like manner in front of his men. As

his personal reward for the leading part Ney and the Sixth Corps had

had in bringing about the triumph, that marshal had the special honour

of being designated to superintend the surrender.

A few minutes before ten o’clock the French drums began to beat, and

the regimental bands to play. Immediately after that the long-drawn-out

procession of sullen and woebegone-looking Austrian captives began

silently to trail its way out of the Stuttgart gate of the fortress.

“Suddenly we saw an endless column file out of the town and march up in

front of the Emperor, on the plain at the foot of a mountain.”

[Sidenote: MACK SURRENDERS HIS SWORD]

General Mack himself headed it, wan-faced and pale as the white

uniform coat he wore, his eyes filled with tears, his head bowed,

a pitiful and abject figure to behold. After him followed eighteen

Austrian generals--a surprising number--most of them as wretched

and downcast-looking as their chief. “Behold, Sire, the unfortunate

Mack!” was the ill fated leader’s address to Napoleon, as he formally

presented his sword. Napoleon, in a mood--as well he might be--in

that hour of unparalleled triumph, to show courtesy to the fallen

foe, desired Mack to keep his sword and remain at his side. He said

the same to the eighteen other generals as, one by one, they came up

in turn to tender him their swords. He returned each his sword and

bade them all place themselves near their chief. When all the swords

had been presented and returned, Napoleon made the Austrian generals

collectively a short harangue. “Gentlemen,” he began, “war has its

chances! Often victorious, you must expect sometimes to be vanquished!”

He did not really know, Napoleon went on, why they were fighting.

Their master had begun against him an unjust war. “I want nothing on

the Continent,” said Napoleon in conclusion, “only ships, colonies,

and commerce!” It was on the day before Trafalgar that these memorable

words were spoken. The Austrian generals stared at Napoleon blankly,

but not one uttered a word. “They were all very dull; it was the

Emperor alone who kept up the conversation.” Then they took their stand

beside their conqueror and looked on at the bitterly humiliating scene

of the defilade of their fellow soldiers.

[Sidenote: THE PARADE OF THE VANQUISHED]

In an almost incessant throng the columns of the Austrian army

streamed by: white-clad cuirassiers; hussars in red and blue and grey;

battery after battery of cocked-hatted, brown-garbed artillerymen,

riding with or on their rumbling dull-yellow wheeled guns; battalion

after battalion of white-coated linesmen; dark-green coated jägers;

Hungarian grenadiers, and so on. Twenty-seven thousand officers and

men and sixty field-guns in all defiled past the Eagles, proudly

arrayed there above them, in front of the serried lines of glittering

French bayonets along the hillsides. For five hours on end the host

of captives plodded on before the rocky brow from which Napoleon

surveyed the spectacle; tramping by, their muskets without bayonets

and unloaded, their cartridge-boxes emptied. In several regiments the

men maintained a fair semblance of discipline and military order; but

the ranks of all were sadly bedraggled-looking, the white uniforms

torn and soiled and besmirched with powder-smoke, with many of the men

hatless, or limping from wounds, or with bound-up heads, and their arms

in bloodstained slings. As had been ordered by Napoleon, they carried

with them their standards; no fewer than forty silken battle-flags--for

the most part cased, but here and there was to be seen one not furled,

displaying, as though in futile defiance, its flaunting yellow folds

with the double-headed Black Eagle.

As the Austrian linesmen came abreast of where Napoleon stood, the

pace of the men slackened. Every eye was turned to look at “him”; at

the small grey-coated figure on foot beside the watchfire, standing

near the crestfallen group of their own generals, a few paces from the

bright and brilliant-hued cavalcade of French marshals and the staff.

All stared at Napoleon, gazing as if under a spell. Then, in the midst

of it all, this happened. Suddenly, as they passed Napoleon, a shout

rose from among the ranks of the defeated army: “Es lebe der Kaiser!”

(“Long live the Emperor!”) The cry burst forth with startling effect.

It was repeated, and then several men took it up. But what did it

mean? “Es lebe der Kaiser!” was the national German greeting in salute

to their own Austrian sovereign as Head of the Empire, to the Kaiser

at Vienna, the Emperor of Germany. Did the soldiers who first raised

the cry intend it for that, or to hail Napoleon, as his own men did,

with a “Vive l’Empereur!”? The words bore the same meaning. Or did the

men fling the words at Napoleon in a sort of bravado, as a show of

defiance? Some of the Austrians assuredly did mean them so; to relieve

the breaking strain, the terrible tension of the ordeal. At least some

of the French officers near Napoleon took that view of it. “As they

passed by,” describes one, “the prisoners, seized with wonder, with

admiration, slowed down in their march to gaze at their conqueror,

and some cried out ‘Long live the Emperor!’ but no doubt under very

different emotions; some with evident mortification.”

[Sidenote: GIVING UP THE GUNS AND HORSES]

From the presence of Napoleon the captive army passed to the scene of

the act of final humiliation: to the place where, midway between the

lines of bayonets of the troops of Ney and Marmont, they were to lay

down their colours and ground their arms.

The colours were first surrendered, a French General, Andréossi,

formerly Napoleon’s Ambassador in London, receiving them, with half a

dozen staff officers and orderlies, who deposited the flags one by one

in two commissariat wagons drawn up close by.

It was a moment of the deepest and keenest anguish for proud and

gallant soldiers. All round them on the hillsides most of the French,

overcome by excitement over the unprecedented and amazing spectacle,

were by that time almost beside themselves, rending the air with

exulting shouts and cheers. Under the cruel stress of the ordeal,

as the supreme moment came on, the self-possession of some of the

Austrians, tried beyond endurance, gave way.

The men of the Cavalry and Artillery bore themselves throughout with

well-disciplined steadiness. As they came to the appointed place where

groups of French cavalry troopers and gunners, told off to take over

their horses and guns, were standing near the roadside awaiting them,

they dismounted at the word of command from their own commanders

and stood back. With hardly a murmur from the ranks the Austrian

troopers unbuckled their swords and carbines and pistols, and dropped

them in heaps at the places pointed out to them. With quiet dignity

the officers relinquished their gold-embroidered banners into the

enemy’s hands. In grim silence they saw the victors--who there at

any rate behaved with courtesy and soldierly consideration for the

feeling of the vanquished--step forward to take possession of their

horses and their cannon. Many of the Austrians had tears running down

their cheeks; some stood trembling with suppressed passion;--but all

preserved order and behaved with complete decorum as became disciplined

soldiers.

With others unfortunately, with some of the infantry corps, it was

otherwise. At the very last, before arriving at the place where they

were to give up their weapons, a number of the men in some of the

marching regiments broke down under the fearful strain of the moment

and lost their heads. In many regiments, no doubt, the soldiers obeyed

mechanically, acting like men half stunned after a violent shock; they

did as they were told, and passively grounded their arms to order.

But in others the final scene was attended by acts of wild frenzy,

pitiful to behold. In, as it were, a paroxysm of exasperation at the

disgrace that had befallen them, the rank and file of these broke out

recklessly, and got at once beyond all efforts of their officers to

control. With one accord they began smashing the locks and butts of

their muskets on the ground with savage curses, flinging away their

arms all round, and stripping off their accoutrements and stamping on

them, trampling them down in the mud. These, though, as has been said,

were only some of the men; and in certain regiments. The majority of

the Austrians bore themselves with fortitude and calmness.

At the end of the afternoon the Imperial Guard, headed by their Eagle

and band, marched into Ulm and through the city, as we are told, “amid

the shouts of the whole populace.”

So terminated the tragedy of Ulm, in the presence of the Eagles on

their first triumphant battlefield.

[Sidenote: THE ULM TROPHIES FOR PARIS]

The spoils of the Eagles at all points, as announced by Napoleon in

the Ulm Bulletin of the Grand Army, were 60,000 prisoners, 200 pieces

of cannon, and, in all, 90 flags. The 40 standards surrendered at Ulm

itself Napoleon sent to Paris forthwith--after a grand parade of the

trophies at Augsburg, in which ninety sergeants of the Imperial Guard

bore in procession the Austrian flags. The Ulm trophies were made an

Imperial gift for the Senate. “It is a homage,” wrote Napoleon, “which

I and my Army pay to the Sages of the Empire.” They were the flags, it

may be added, which were displayed at the head of Napoleon’s coffin on

the occasion of his State funeral in 1840: they form four-fifths of the

trophies now grouped round Napoleon’s tomb. Alone of the trophies of

the Ulm campaign, and also of the Austerlitz campaign which followed

it, they escaped destruction in the holocaust of Napoleon’s trophies

that took place at the Invalides in March 1814, on the night of the

surrender of Paris to the Allies. How that came to pass will be told

later.

There was a very interesting sequel to the Ulm campaign for one of

Ney’s regiments. A brief but brilliant campaign in the Tyrol on their

own account followed for Ney’s men immediately after Ulm.

Entering the Tyrol with two of his divisions, Ney attacked and

by brilliant tactics overthrew the Tyrolese forces and Austrian

regulars who barred his way in a position among the mountains deemed

impregnable. The battalion Eagles of the 69th gave the signal for

the frontal attack which stormed the enemy’s position. Guided by

chamois-hunters the soldiers with the Eagles scaled the face of a

precipitous line of crags which overhung in rear the Austrian centre,

by inserting their bayonets into fissures in the rocks and clinging

to shrubs and creepers, their havresacs tied round their heads as

protection from the stones that the Tyrolese above showered down on

them. At the top, driving in the defenders, they held up the gleaming

Eagles in the sunlight on the brink of the precipice to the marshal

below, firing down on the Austrians at the same time to demoralise

their resistance and clear the way for Ney’s main effort: “Les Aigles

du 69me plantées sur la cime des rochers servirent de signal à

l’attacque de front que le Maréchal Ney avait preparé.”

Innsbrück, the capital of the Tyrol, and the head-quarters of the

Austrian army corps garrisoning the country, was the immediate prize of

the victory. It was there that this incident took place.

[Sidenote: TWO LOST FLAGS ARE FOUND]

One of Ney’s regiments, the 76th, had fought in the Tyrol six years

before; in Masséna’s campaign of 1799, in one of the battles of

which--at Senft in the Grisons, on August 22--two of its battalions

lost their colours. An officer of the regiment, while visiting the

arsenal at Innsbrück after Ney’s capture of the city, came across the

two flags there, in tatters from bullet-holes, hung up as trophies. He

made known his discovery, and the place was quickly filled with the

soldiers of the regiment, eager to see the old flags. “They crowded

round them and kissed the fragments of their old colours, with tears in

their eyes.”

Ney had the flags removed at once. He restored them to the custody

of the regiment with his own hand at a grand parade in the presence

of the rest of his army, which the marshal attended with his staff,

all in full uniform. The old colours were received with an elaborate

display of military ceremonial. They were borne along the lines while

the regimental band played a stately march, and the Eagles of both

battalions were formally dipped in salute to them.

On receiving Ney’s report, Napoleon thought fit to give the recovery

of the flags a Bulletin to itself. Relating how they had been lost in

battle, and the “affliction profonde” of the regiment in consequence,

he set forth how they had been found and handed back by Marshal Ney to

the regiment “with an affecting solemnity that drew tears from the eyes

of both the old soldiers and the young conscripts, proud of having had

their share in regaining them!” “Le soldat Français,” concluded the

Bulletin, “a pour ses drapeaux un sentiment qui tient de la tendresse;

ils sont l’objet de son culte, comme un présent reçu des mains d’une

mère.” A medal was specially struck to commemorate the event; and

Napoleon, in addition, specially commissioned an artist, Meynier,

to paint a picture for him of Marshal Ney presenting the recovered

colours to the regiment. The painting is now in one of the galleries of

Versailles.

THE MIDNIGHT BATTLE BY THE DANUBE

[Sidenote: TRAPPED BY NAPOLEON’S FAULT]

A startling and dramatic episode of the first campaign of the Eagles

comes next. It took place during the second stage of the war; in

the midst of Napoleon’s impetuous advance on Vienna down the Danube

valley after Ulm. Intent on dealing a shattering blow at the advanced

army corps of the Russians, which had reached Lower Austria and was

making an effort to cover the capital, Napoleon made a false move,

and left one of the headmost French divisions in an exposed position,

temporarily isolated. It got trapped by the Russians at Dürrenstein, or

Dirnstein, on the north side of the Danube, to the west of and about

seventy miles up the river from Vienna; and was all but annihilated.

There was nearly twenty hours of continuous fighting, including a night

battle of the fiercest and most desperate character in which three

Eagles were temporarily lost; fortunately to be recovered later among

the dead on the battlefield.[8]

It was on an extemporised corps, specially placed under the command of

Marshal Mortier, that the blow fell.

[Illustration: NAPOLEON’S CONCENTRATION IN REAR OF ULM]

While Napoleon and the Grand Army in force advanced along the south, or

right, bank of the Danube, Mortier had been detached across the river

to hold in check any attempt to interfere with the main operations

from the Bohemian side. A body of Austrian cavalry, under the Archduke

Ferdinand, had managed to cut their way through from Ulm at one point

just before the closing of the net round General Mack. With the aid of

the local militia levies these might prove troublesome on the line of

communications. To deal with them, three divisions, drawn from as many

corps, were amalgamated as Mortier’s special corps, which numbered in

all between twenty and twenty-five thousand men: Gazan’s division, lent

by Marshal Lannes; Dupont’s, lent by Ney; Dumonceau’s, lent by Marmont.

To keep Mortier in touch with the main body of the army, and that he

might be reinforced in emergency, a flotilla of Danube craft was at

the same time improvised, and placed in charge of the Seamen of the

Guard, a battalion of whom had accompanied Napoleon for the campaign.

The flotilla was to keep pace with Mortier and link him with Napoleon.

Mortier crossed at Linz and moved forward; his three divisions each a

day’s march apart, for convenience of provisioning. He marched so fast,

however, that he outstripped the connecting boats.

[Sidenote: THE DANUBE FLOTILLA STOPPED]

At the moment the fighting opened, the flotilla was miles in rear.

It had been stopped and its progress blocked near Moelkt, unable in

the swollen state of the Danube to pass the dangerous Strudel, or

whirlpool, there, raging just then, after the heavy autumn rains,

with the force of a swirling maelstrom. The flooded river had made it

extremely difficult work all the way, even for the picked Seamen of

the Guard, to navigate with safety the assortment of boats and timber

rafts, clumsy structures of logs and spars lashed together, 160 feet

long each, and planked over, with cabins on the planks, which composed

the flotilla. On them, together with a quantity of spare stores and

ammunition for the army, convalescents and footsore men of various

regiments were being carried, who, it was intended, would thus be on

the spot to reinforce Mortier first of all in case of danger.

Immediately after passing Dürrenstein, the leading division, General

Gazan’s, numbering some 6,000 men, unexpectedly stumbled across part

of the Russian rearguard. All unknown to Mortier, the Russian army

corps which had been entrenched in front of Vienna had abandoned its

position and had hastily withdrawn north of the river, crossing a short

distance from Dürrenstein.

Mortier, after clearing a narrow and difficult pass on the eastern

side of Dürrenstein, with steep and rocky hills on one hand and the

Danube on the other, first learned of the presence of the enemy by

catching sight of the smoke of the burning bridge of Krems, which the

Russians had set fire to after passing over. Then he suddenly found

his further advance barred by troops with guns, who rapidly formed up

across his path. The Russians took up a formidable-looking position,

but the marshal decided to attack without waiting for Dupont to come

up with the Second Division, or for the flotilla; both miles in rear.

The sight of the burning bridge and the apparent haste of the enemy

to get across the river, it would seem, misled Mortier into thinking

that the Russians had been in action with Napoleon, and were in flight,

trying to escape. He went at them without pausing to reconnoitre. He

assumed that they were only making a show of defence. The troops before

him he would sweep aside easily. Then he would press on and complete

the rout of the rest of the Russians, whom he took to be retreating in

confusion, screened by the force he saw, across his front. Confident

of easy success, Mortier entered into the fight then and there.

[Sidenote: A SURPRISE FOR THE MARSHAL]

The sudden rencontre, as has been said, was a surprise for the

marshal. Half an hour previously a battle had been almost the last

thing in Mortier’s thoughts. His guns were on board a number of river

boats which were being drifted downstream abreast of the troops, the

artillery horses being led with the marching columns along the bank.

The boats had been requisitioned a few miles back, so as to enable

the troops to get on faster over the rough stretch of road through

the Pass of Dürrenstein. The guns were hastily disembarked and raced

forward into the firing line in order to stop a forward movement that

the Russians, who promptly took advantage of the opportunity offered by

Mortier being apparently without artillery, began by making.

The Russians came on and quickly increased in numbers, to Marshal

Mortier’s further surprise. Were those beaten troops in full flight?

They began to swarm down to meet the French; heading for the guns as

these were being brought forward. The fight rapidly became general, and

charge after charge was made by the Russians to carry Mortier’s guns.

They captured them, but were then beaten back and the guns recaptured.

Twice were the guns taken and retaken. The two French regiments nearest

the guns, the 100th and 103rd, defended them with brilliant courage,

their four battalion Eagles conspicuous in the forefront and repeatedly

the centre of desperate fighting, as the Russians essayed again and

again at the point of the bayonet to make prize of the gleaming emblems.

But more and more Russians kept joining in, and after four hours of

very severe fighting the marshal began to get anxious. He had gained

ground towards Krems, and had made some 1,500 prisoners; but every

foot of the way had been stubbornly contested, and his losses had been

serious.

Mortier after that left the troops, and with an aide de camp galloped

back through the pass in order to hasten up Dupont. But the Second

Division was still at a distance. Dupont’s men were still a long way

beyond Dürrenstein and could not arrive for some time yet. Mortier

could only tell them not to lose a moment, and then retrace his own

steps. On his way back, to his amazement, he came upon a second Russian

column in great strength in the act of debouching from a side pass and

entering Dürrenstein. It had come round by a track among the hills on

the north to take Gazan’s division in rear, and interpose between it

and Dupont’s reinforcing troops. At considerable personal risk the

marshal managed to evade discovery by the Russians. By following a

devious by-path he at length got back to where Gazan’s division was;

as before, in hot action and slowly forcing the Russians back.

[Sidenote: TOO LATE TO CLEAR THE PASS]

Mortier stopped the advance at once. He faced his troops about, and,

while keeping off his original enemy, retreated; closing his columns

and rushing all back as fast as possible to repass the defile of

Dürrenstein and confront the new enemy on the further side, in a

position he might hold until Dupont could reinforce him. But it was

already too late. The French reached the entrance of the pass on the

near side to find it already occupied by the Russians, who were pouring

through in dense masses. There were nearly 20,000 of them on that side

of him and 15,000 on the other, his former foes now fast closing in

from behind hard on his heels. Mortier’s reduced ranks numbered barely

4,000 all told.

Owing to the high, steep rocks on one hand, and the river on the other,

it was impossible to push past the Russians on either flank. All that

could be done was to attack in front and try to cut a way through.

That; or to surrender! With reckless impetuosity the French attacked,

firing furiously and flinging themselves on the Russian bayonets;

while their rearguard, facing round, kept their first foes back. For

two long hours they fought like that; their ranks swept by the enemy’s

cannon on each side. At length they forced the entrance to the pass:

but they could get no farther. They had by then lost all their guns

but two: but they still had all their Eagles. With bullet-holes through

some of them, and their silken flags shot away or torn to tatters,

the Eagles did their part. Now they were rallying-centres; now they

were leading charges. There was hardly a battalion in which the first

standard-bearer had not gone down.

All were fighting almost without hope, holding out in sheer despair

as long as they had cartridges left, when, as that dreadful November

afternoon was drawing to its close, suddenly, from beyond the far end

of the pass was heard the booming of a distant cannonade. The soldiers

heard it and hope revived. It could only be Dupont! Help, then, was

coming! The despairing rank and file took heart again--but the hour of

rescue was not yet.

They had four long hours more to go through; every hour making their

terrible situation worse. At nightfall “our cavalry gave way, our

firing slackened, our bayonets, from incessant use, became bent and

blunted. The confusion became terrible. Things, indeed, could hardly

have got worse.” So an officer describes. The enemy, in places, had

got right in among them, but “our soldiers, being the handier and more

agile, had an advantage over the great clumsy Russians.” Here and there

“the men were so close, that they seized each other by the throat.”

In the midst of the fiercest of the fighting the tall figure of the

marshal was conspicuous. He was seen amid the flashes from the muskets

“at the head of a party of grenadiers, sword in hand, laying about him

like any trooper.”

[Sidenote: “YOUR DUTY IS TO SAVE THE EAGLES!”]

The Battalion-Eagles of the 100th, with their Porte-Aigles and a

handful of soldiers, got cut off together, amid a surging \_mêlée\_

of Russians. The major of the regiment, Henriot by name, the senior

surviving officer--the colonel of the 100th, as also the colonel of the

103rd, had fallen earlier in the fight--saw what was happening and the

extreme peril of the Eagles. Calling for volunteers, he got together

some of his men, cut his way through to the Eagles, and rescued them.

Major Henriot, after that, having saved the Eagles for the moment,

determined as a last resource to attempt a forlorn-hope charge; to

get beyond the enemy and reach Dupont with them. It might be possible

to save them under the cover of darkness. One of the Porte-Aigles of

the 6th Light Infantry with his Eagle, near by at the moment, joined

the devoted band of men that the intrepid major now managed to rally

round the Eagles of the 100th. With half a dozen stirring words Henriot

called on them to follow him. “Comrades, we must break through! They

are more than we, but you are Frenchmen: you don’t count numbers!

Remember, your duty is to save the Eagles of France!” (“Souvenez vous

qu’il s’agit de sauver les Aigles Françaises!”)

There was a hoarse shout in reply: “We are all Grenadiers! Pas de

charge!”

They dashed at the Russians, Henriot leading, and, after fighting their

way through the pass and nearly to Dürrenstein, fell to a man. Yet the

three Eagles did not fall into Russian hands, thanks to the darkness.

They were found next morning by French search-parties under a heap of

dead, where the last survivors, fighting back to back, had fallen while

making their final stand.

So desperate, indeed, did things look for the French at one time, a

little before midnight, that some of his staff appealed to Mortier to

make his escape and get across to the other side of the Danube in a

boat, “so that a Marshal of France shall not fall into the hands of the

enemy!”

But the gallant veteran flatly refused to listen to the proposal.

“No,” was his answer, “certainly not! I will not desert my brave

comrades! I will save them or die with them! Keep the boats for the

wounded,” he went on. “We have still two guns and some case-shot--rally

and make a last effort!”

Almost immediately afterwards an opportunity did offer for the marshal

to save them.

[Illustration: MARSHAL MORTIER.]

[Sidenote: A DASH IN THE DARK TO HELP]

Two of Dupont’s regiments at that moment reached the battle. By

persistent exertions, outstripping the rest of the Second Division,

and continuing in the dark, guided by the flashes of the guns, they

had made their way by a goat-path along the steep rocky slopes at the

side of the defile and taken the Russians barring Mortier’s retreat in

rear. Instantly the new arrivals flung themselves hotly into the fight.

They were the 9th Light Infantry and the 32nd of the Line, that old

favourite of Napoleon’s in the days of the Army of Italy, whose flag on

the Eagle-staff bore, as has been said, the golden inscription which

Napoleon had placed there--“J’étais tranquille, le brave 32me était là.”

The golden legend was of good omen for Mortier.

Their interposition put the Russian main force between two fires,

weakening the attack on Mortier and compelling a portion of them to

face about. Its effect was speedily felt, and at once; although a

desperate effort by the two regiments to break through and join hands

with Mortier, in which the Eagles of the 9th and 32nd were “taken and

retaken,” was beaten back under pressure of numbers.

The arrival of the two regiments so opportunely put heart into all:

Dupont’s whole division, declared the marshal, could not be far off.

He himself would make an effort to meet him on the farther side of the

pass.

“Then,” as is described by Napoleon’s aide de camp, Count de Sègur,

“rallying and closing up the remaining troops, he brought up the

only two guns left him. One was to point towards Krems and against

Kutusoff’s troops; the other Mortier placed at the head of the column,

in the direction of Dürrenstein. As all the drums had been broken he

had the charge sounded on iron cooking-cans.

“At that moment the Austrian general, Schmidt, who had led the Russian

corps from Dürrenstein, headed a final charge which was to strike a

crushing blow and complete the destruction of our column. But Fabvier

(the colonel in charge of Mortier’s artillery) heard them advance.

Concealed by the darkness, he let Schmidt approach quite near. Then

he suddenly fired the gun on that side, at the shortest range, in

among the headmost of the attacking troops. The discharge threw the

enemy into confusion and killed their leader. Into this bloody opening

Mortier and Gazan precipitated themselves, overthrowing everything

before them. Dürrenstein itself was retaken in the impetuous dash.”

It was indeed a \_tour de force\_; a sudden reversal of the fortunes

of the fight. The feat in its complete accomplishment surprised even

Mortier’s expectations. “The Marshal, in fact, could hardly believe

his own success.” So an officer puts it. But he had done more than

burst through the toils. As daylight next morning showed, the Russians,

driven headlong, had abandoned six of their guns, and left in the

hands of the French no fewer than twelve standards. Two of them

were taken by the two Dupont regiments which had so gallantly flung

themselves on the Russian rear.

That was as concerned honour and glory. As a set off, barely 2,000

remained of Mortier’s corps of 6,000 men. Two-thirds of the total when

the roll was called next day were found to have fallen on the field.

[Sidenote: THEIR FATE STILL IN DOUBT]

Mortier’s men regained Dürrenstein, all in flames; set on fire by the

Russians as they evacuated the village. But where was Dupont and his

Division? They had heard Dupont’s distant guns just before dark; but

except the two regiments who had been rushed forward independently,

ahead of the main body, starting immediately after Mortier’s visit in

the early afternoon, no help from Dupont had reached them. Gazan’s

wearied survivors of the midnight battle dared not even yet lay aside

their arms. The fight was not all over. The enemy were still near by;

just beyond the outskirts of the village. Both the Russian divisions

that they had been fighting with in front and rear had in the end

united. Outnumbering Mortier’s men as they did by ten to one, the

Russians would certainly turn back and be on them before long with

re-formed ranks, eager to take vengeance for their defeat and the rough

handling they had undergone.

But the end was near.

Suddenly, from the farther side of Dürrenstein, from the direction

in which the enemy had fallen back, there came a violent outburst of

firing. Immediately on that followed sounds of shouting. Then there was

the trampling rush of a great host of men all making for the village.

“With despair in our hearts we were preparing for another battle, when,

in answer to our challenge of ‘Qui vive?’ came back, with electrifying

effect, the answer ‘France!’ It was Dupont. At last he had arrived to

the rescue of his Marshal.

“We recognised each other in the light of the blazing houses, and with

transports of joy and gratitude and cries of ‘Long live our rescuers!’

our men threw themselves on the necks of their deliverers.”

In that dramatic fashion the battle of Dürrenstein reached its close.

The Russians fell back under cover of the night, retreating up the

lateral valley-pass, by which way at the outset they had worked their

way round, guided by the Austrian general, Schmidt, to surprise and cut

off Gazan’s division.

Napoleon, in his great relief at learning that Mortier had come through

without disaster, for once blamed nobody. He knew that he himself was

most of all to blame, for exposing to sudden attack a comparatively

weak detachment of his army in the face of an enemy still full of

fight, on the farther side of a deep and rapid river. “It seemed,”

in Marbot’s words, “as if no explanation of this operation beyond the

Danube satisfactory to military men being possible, there was a desire

to hush up its consequences.”

[Sidenote: BY WAY OF COVERING THE BLUNDER]

By way of covering up his own glaring blunder Napoleon heaped praises

on the troops engaged. He expressed unbounded admiration at the stand

they had made. In the 22nd “Bulletin of the Grand Army,” issued from

Schönbrunn, near Vienna, two days later, the Emperor declared that

“le combat de Dürrenstein sera à jamais mémorable dans les annales

militaires.” Gazan, he said, had shown “beaucoup de valeur et de

conduite.” The 4me and 9me Légère and the 32nd and 100th of the Line,

wrote Napoleon, “se sont couverts de gloire.”

CHAPTER IV

ON THE FIELD OF AUSTERLITZ

Austerlitz, the crowning triumph of the First War of the Grand Army,

set its \_cachet\_ to the fame of the Eagles.

Napoleon there lured the enemy on into attacking him at apparent

disadvantage on ground of his own choosing. Then, availing himself to

the fullest extent of the flagrant blundering of his assailants, he

struck at them with a smashing, knock-down blow from the shoulder.

[Sidenote: LURED ON TO MEET THEIR FATE]

By making believe that his army was separated in detachments, out of

touch, and beyond possibility of early concentration, and causing

it to appear further that he had become alarmed for his own safety

and was on the point of commencing a retreat, he decoyed them into

a false move. He tempted the Czar Alexander, whose main force had

arrived within a few miles of Vienna, and was confronting him, into

making a rash manœuvre designed to cut his line of communications and

defeat him before the second Austrian army in the field, under the

Archduke Charles, hastening from the Italian frontier to join hands

with the Russians, could reach the scene. In the confident belief that

by themselves they outnumbered Napoleon at the critical point by two

to one, with nearly 90,000 men to 40,000, the Russians made a risky

flank march to interpose between Napoleon and his base, and drive him

in rout into the wilds of Bohemia. They began their advance suddenly,

on Thursday, November 2, but immediately afterwards wasted two days

through faulty leadership. Before they could get within striking

distance of Napoleon he had called in his detached corps and had massed

70,000 men at the point of danger. Foreseeing the possibility of the

enemy’s move, his apparent disposal of the various corps had been

elaborately arranged so as to ensure concentration at short notice in

case of emergency.

From hour to hour during Sunday, December 1, the Russian army in dense

columns streamed past within six miles of the French position in full

view of Napoleon, all marching forward in stolid silence, intent only

on getting between Napoleon and Vienna. No counter-move meanwhile was

made from the French side. Strict orders were sent to the outposts

that not a shot was to be fired. But by the early afternoon all was

ready for action. Completely seeing through the enemy’s plans, Napoleon

exclaimed in a tone of absolute confidence: “Before to-morrow night

that army is mine!”

On Napoleon’s right flank, in a strong defensive position, stood

Marshal Davout’s corps, thrown back at an angle to the main front of

the army, so as to induce the enemy to extend themselves widely on

that side before opening their attack. Marshal Soult’s corps, the

most powerful in the Grand Army, formed the centre; supported by the

Imperial Guard, Oudinot’s Grenadier Division, and two divisions of

Mortier’s corps. Marshal Lannes’ corps, with Bernadotte’s, was on

the left, as well as Murat’s cavalry. Napoleon proposed to allow the

Russian leading columns to circle round his right flank and get into

action with Davout. Then, as soon as they were committed to their

attack in that quarter, Soult’s immense force would hurl itself on the

Russian centre and break through it by sheer weight of numbers. Thus

the Allied Army would be cleft in two, after which Napoleon would only

have to fling his weight to either side for the enemy to be destroyed

in detail. During Soult’s move, Lannes on the left flank was to hold

in check by a brisk attack the Russian right wing and reserves, which

would prevent assistance reaching the centre until too late to save the

day. So the battle was planned; so it was fought and won.

[Illustration: Sketch Plan of the Positions of the Armies at the

opening of the Battle of AUSTERLITZ]

The Allied columns were seen during Sunday afternoon to be steadily

moving southward over a high ridge opposite the French camp,

crowned near the centre by the lofty plateau of Pratzen, the key

of the position on the Russian side. They streamed along from the

direction of the village of Austerlitz, a short distance away to the

north-east, from which the battle took its name. A tract of low marshy

country, the valley of the little river Goldbach, four miles across,

with two or three hamlets dotting it here and there, connected by

narrow cart-roads, divided the two armies. The French position, facing

eastwards, was on a range of tableland along the west side of the

valley of the Goldbach.

[Sidenote: THE KEY OF THE POSITION]

Monday morning came, and the “Sun of Austerlitz”--so often

apostrophised by Napoleon in after days--rose in a cloudless sky above

the early mists lying dense over the marshy ground of the low-lying

valley between the armies. The dominating crest of the Pratzen plateau

showed above the mist almost bare of troops. On the evening before

it had bristled with Russian bayonets, glistening in the rays of the

setting sun. Pratzen, the master-key of the battlefield, had been left

unoccupied. The enemy’s corps had taken no measures to hold it in their

haste to get forward to attack the French right wing, and cut Napoleon

off.

Soult’s corps--the entire French army had been under arms since four

o’clock--was ordered to descend into the valley before the morning mist

dissipated as the sun rose. Under cover of the mist Soult was to get

as close as possible to the foot of the Pratzen Hill, so as to be on

the spot ready to seize the height immediately the battle opened on the

right.

Napoleon waited, standing among the marshals on foot near the centre

of the position, until between seven and eight o’clock. Then sharp

firing suddenly broke out from the direction of Davout’s corps, and a

few minutes later an aide de camp came galloping up with the news that

the enemy were attacking the right wing in great force. “Now,” said

Napoleon, “is the moment.” The marshals sprang on their horses and

spurred off to head their corps.

So Austerlitz opened.

Its first brunt, as Napoleon had foreseen, fell hard and heavily on the

French right wing; but Davout’s men there proved well able to maintain

their ground. The sturdy linesmen on that side disputed every foot

of the position at the point of the bayonet against four times their

numbers.

Right gallantly, time and again, did the Eagles on that part of the

field fulfil their rôle and take their part; now heading charges, now

rallying round them the men who had sworn to die in their defence.

[Sidenote: “SOLDIERS, I STAY HERE!”]

The 15th Light Infantry--a corps in the ranks of which were many young

soldiers, now under fire for the first time in their lives--stormed the

village of Tellnitz, which the Russians had carried in their first

rush on the French outposts. The leading battalion of the 15th drove

the Russians out; and, dashing on beyond the village, met a reinforcing

Russian column hastening to the spot. They charged it without

hesitation, but could not break through, and then they began to recoil

before superior numbers. The Eagle-bearer was shot down, and fell badly

wounded. He had to leave hold of his Eagle, and amid the surging throng

of soldiers in disorder it was in great danger of being trampled under

foot and lost. Fortunately the officer in command, \_Chef de Bataillon\_

Dulong, saw what had happened, and sprang from his horse and seized

the Eagle. Holding it on high with one hand, he shouted to his men to

stand fast. “Soldiers, I stay here!” he called. “Let me see if you will

abandon your Eagle and your commander.” The act and words checked the

disorder. The battalion rallied at once, re-formed ranks, and made head

against the enemy until help arrived, when the Russians were driven

back.

The Eagle of another battalion in the same division of Davout’s army

corps, General Friant’s, the 111th of the Line, a little time later had

its part. The 111th had suffered heavily in the earlier fighting, but

towards eleven o’clock were called on to lead a counter-attack beyond

the line of fortified hedgerow that the regiment was holding, against

a fresh Russian column which was advancing with loud shouts and

bayonets at the charge to storm their position. Immediately in front

was a wide, open stretch of ground, across which a Russian battery, to

cover the attack, was pouring a tremendous fire of shell, the bursting

projectiles tearing up the ground as if it were being ploughed. Just

as the order to advance was given, the Porte-Aigle fell dead. An old

sergeant, Courbet by name, took his place. He seized the Eagle and

looked round, for several of the men were wavering. They were unwilling

to leave cover for certain death, as it looked, on the shell-swept

space of open ground before them. Courbet climbed over the hedge, and,

waving the Eagle and flag with both hands, stood by himself amid the

bursting shells, some twenty yards in front. “Come on, comrades!” he

shouted--“come on!” Then with the words, “A moi, soldats du 111me!”

brandishing the Eagle, he ran straight at the fast-nearing Russians.

“The effect,” says one who saw the brave deed done, “was electric.” The

men streamed over the hedge instantly, re-formed line in spite of the

cannon-balls, and, led by the grenadiers of the battalion, charged the

approaching enemy, broke them, drove them before them, and seized the

village in front, whence the Russians had made their advance.

The Eagle of the 48th, another of Friant’s regiments, in like manner

was rallied in the moment of supreme crisis by the daring of its

Eagle-bearer.

[Sidenote: SUDDENLY FIRED ON BY FRIENDS]

The Eagle of the 108th, which regiment was fighting near by, all but

fell into the enemy’s hands through a blunder. It was early in the

morning, at the very beginning of the fight, in crossing a marshy

strip under cover of the mist, to take in flank the Russian attack. In

the uncertain light another French regiment, the 26th Light Infantry,

one of Soult’s regiments, moving about a hundred yards on the left

of Davout’s men, mistook the 108th for the enemy, and fired heavily

into it. The Eagle-bearer was among those shot down, and fell with the

Eagle. This sudden blow from an unexpected quarter staggered the 108th.

They fell back hastily to re-form in rear, leaving their Eagle, whose

fall had been unobserved in the mist, lying beside its dead bearer on

the ground. The loss was discovered just as another force of Russians,

who came up in front, reached the place; but before they could carry

off the trophy a charge forward by some hastily rallied men of the

108th recovered the Eagle and bore it back to safety.

So far then with Davout’s corps.

Soult, meanwhile, in the centre, was striking hard. His attack, in its

effect on the Allied Army, was a complete surprise. Soult’s advance

began the instant that the marshal, riding at full gallop from the

presence of Napoleon, could reach his men. At that moment the third of

the Russian columns in the order of march, pressing ahead to overtake

the first and second, and join in the attack on Davout, had not long

descended the southern slope at the foot of the Pratzen heights; while

the fourth Russian column, a mile or more in rear, was just about to

ascend the northern slope to cross the Pratzen Hill and follow.

Up the steep western hillside face of the Pratzen clambered Soult’s

regiments. Unseen by the enemy at any point, without a shot being fired

at them, or by them, until just as they were nearing the crest-line of

the ridge, they emerged from the mists of the valley and seized the

high ground.

They moved on a front of three divisions. Legrand’s was on the right,

echeloned in the direction of Davout’s left flank so as to keep touch

with that marshal. St. Hilaire’s was in the centre, advancing in a long

line of battalions in attack formation. Vandamme’s division was on the

left.

The Allied fourth column caught a glimpse of Vandamme’s men as they

were climbing the last ascent, and raced forward to form up and bar

their way. There were 14,000 troops in the column, half Austrians, half

Russians; and the Czar Alexander with the Emperor of Austria rode with

them.

[Illustration: MARSHAL SOULT.

In the uniform of Colonel-in-Chief of the Chasseurs of the Guard.]

Attacking at once, the French broke through the Allied front line,

and, after a hard fight--for the Austro-Russian regiments, fighting

under the two Sovereigns’ eyes, resisted with desperate valour--forced

it back on the second line with the loss of several guns.

[Sidenote: GRAPE-SHOT AT THIRTY PACES]

Again there the Eagles took their part. On the right of St. Hilaire’s

attack, the brigade of General Thiébault became separated in the

fighting with the Russian foremost line. Its three regiments--the

10th Light Infantry, the 14th, and the 36th--became separated, and

one of them, the 36th, was for a time in danger of being overpowered

by part of the Russian third column, which had faced about on hearing

the firing in rear and was hastening back up the hill. Two Russian

regiments raced up towards them on that side. Some Austrian infantry

of the fourth column, extending in their direction, were at the same

time coming at them on the left. In front the 36th was faced by two

Russian batteries, which dashed up, unlimbered, and blazed away,

firing grape and case shot at barely thirty paces; as well as by some

Russian dragoons, who made as if about to charge. To keep the dragoons

off, the leading battalion attempted to form square; but the men,

breathless after their rush uphill, were in some disorder and for

the moment out of hand. The square, while yet half formed, was then

nearly torn to pieces by a staggering discharge of grape, and several

of the men began to get unsteady. It looked bad for the 36th, when,

of a sudden, Adjutant Labadie, of the First Battalion, snatched the

Eagle from its bearer and ran out in front. He stopped short and held

the Eagle-staff with both hands planted firmly on the ground. Then he

called to the men, in a momentary pause while the Russian gunners were

reloading: “Soldiers of the 36th, rally to the front! Here is your line

of battle!” The men saw him, and obeyed. The disorder ceased. Quickly

deploying to right and left, they dashed at the Russian guns. At the

same moment the other two regiments of the brigade, led by St. Hilaire

and the brigadier, sword in hand, came up at the \_pas de charge\_,

bayonets levelled. The 10th Light Infantry brilliantly repulsed the

Austrians on one side: the 14th on the other side drove Kamenskoi’s

Russians back down the hill.

Supporting the 10th Light Infantry was the 59th of the Line, one of

Mortier’s corps, of Dupont’s division, which had been sent forward

to help in holding the Pratzen heights. Some of the Russian dragoons

dashed in among them as they deployed to follow the 10th. A Russian

officer cut down the Eagle-bearer and seized the Eagle. Sergeant-Major

Gamier, the “Porte-Aigle,” struggled to his feet in spite of his

wounds, wrested the Eagle back, and with his free hand fought with his

sword and killed the Russian, saving the Eagle.

On St. Hilaire’s left, during this time, Vandamme’s division had had

to fight its way forward against the Russians and Austrians of the

fourth column, several battalions of which, with artillery, had rapidly

taken post along a range of knolls towards the northern edge of the

Pratzen plateau. Driving back at the outset six Russian battalions,

which charged forward to meet them, springing up from the shelter of

a dip in the ground, Vandamme’s men, “without firing a shot, with

the bayonet only, advanced on the main enemy with shouldered arms,

not replying to the Russian musketry.” When within forty yards, they

halted, fired a volley, and dashed in with bayonets lowered. The attack

was successful beyond expectation. The enemy before them were routed,

and all their guns taken, with many prisoners. Then Vandamme received

orders to wheel his division to the right and take in flank the enemy,

at that moment in hot fight with St. Hilaire.

[Sidenote: THE RUSSIAN GUARD COME UP]

Vandamme was in the middle of the move when one of his brigades met

with a sudden and unexpected disaster. Two battalions belonging to the

24th Light Infantry and the 4th of the Line, who fought side by side on

the extreme left of Vandamme’s command, were all but annihilated. As

they were wheeling round, the Russian Imperial Guard came up, hurrying

forward from the Reserve, and set on them fiercely. It was just to the

left of the village of Pratzen, as approached from the French side,

on the farther side of the plateau. The Russian Foot Guards forced the

4th and the 24th Light Infantry back into some vineyards adjoining the

village in disorder. The last to retire was the First Battalion of

the 4th. They had hardly gained the edge of the tract of vineyards,

when, without the least warning of their approach, coming up on their

flank and unseen in the smoke and turmoil of the contest, a more

formidable enemy still assailed them. The Russian Cuirassiers of the

Guard, 2,000 horsemen, troopers of the finest cavalry in the world,

came down on them, and charged them at a gallop on the flank. The Grand

Duke Constantine, brother of the Czar, in person led the Cuirassiers.

Disaster, hideous, overwhelming, crushing, for the two hapless

battalions--that of the 24th Light Infantry was, in like manner, caught

just beyond cover exposed in the open--was the instant result. They

tried to form square at the last moment, but the Cuirassiers were

on them before they could begin the evolution. Both battalions were

practically hurled out of existence within three minutes.

[Sidenote: HOW ONE EAGLE MET ITS FATE]

They were ridden down, trampled on by the huge Russian horses, and

slashed to pieces mercilessly by the giant Russian troopers with their

long straight swords. Both battalions lost their Eagles. That of the

24th Light Infantry was picked up later on the field and restored

to what was left of the ill-fated corps. The Eagle of the 4th was

carried off by the Russians, and is now in the Kazan Cathedral at St.

Petersburg. Yet it was lost with honour; bravely defended to the last.

The Eagle-bearer was cut down. A lieutenant tried to get hold of the

Eagle and save it; he, too, was cut down. A private then snatched it

from the dead officer’s hands, and was in the act of waving it on high

when he in turn was sabred and fell. The Russians made prize of the

trophy at once, and it was carried direct to the Czar Alexander on the

battlefield.

Napoleon, who had moved up near the fighting in the centre, witnessed

the disaster with his own eyes.

The corps, as it happened, too, was one he had taken an interest in.

The 4th of the Line had been in favour with him, and he had appointed

his brother Joseph as its colonel when the 4th was at the Camp of

Boulogne as part of the “Army of England.” He had, indeed, specially

chosen that particular corps for its steadiness. He announced Joseph’s

appointment to it in a message to the Senate on April 18, 1804, “in

order that he should be allowed to contribute to the vengeance which

the French people propose to take for the violation of the Treaty [of

Amiens] and be afforded an opportunity of acquiring a fresh title to

the esteem of the nation.”

In wild panic the survivors of the disaster fled to the rear, tearing

by close past where Napoleon and the Staff were. “They almost rushed

over us and the Emperor himself,” describes De Ségur, who as an aide

de camp was close to the Emperor at the moment. “Our effort to arrest

the rout was in vain. The unfortunate fellows were quite distracted

with fear and would listen to nothing. In reply to our reproaches

for so deserting the field of battle and their Emperor, they shouted

mechanically ‘Vive l’Empereur!’ and they fled away faster than ever.

“Napoleon smiled pitifully. With a scornful gesture, he said to us:

‘Let them go!’ Retaining all his calmness in the midst of the confusion

he despatched Rapp to bring up the Cavalry of the Guard.”

Rapp, another of the Imperial aides de camp, was also Colonel of the

Mamelukes of the Guard. He was at the moment riding close behind

the Emperor. Rapp darted off, and, after taking Napoleon’s order to

charge the Russian Cuirassiers to Marshal Bessières, in command of the

Cavalry of the Guard, he himself led their headmost squadrons forward;

his own swarthy Mamelukes with two squadrons of Chasseurs and one

of Horse Grenadiers. Waving his sabre and calling at the top of his

voice, “Vengeons les! Vengeons nos drapeaux!” “Avenge them! Avenge our

standards!” he led them forward at full gallop. “We dashed at full

speed on the artillery and took them,” described Rapp in a letter. The

guns were those of a Russian battery which had just come into action

close by where the Guard Cuirassiers had charged. “The enemy’s horse

awaited our attack at the halt. They were overthrown by the charge and

fled in confusion, galloping like us over the wrecks of our squares.”

[Sidenote: “WE FOUGHT MAN TO MAN”]

But the Russians rallied quickly. Reinforced by the superb regiment

of the Chevalier Guards, a corps in which all the troopers were men

of birth, they came on to meet the French again. Just at that moment

Bessières, with at his back the magnificent cavalry of Napoleon’s

Guard, came up at full speed. Rapp’s squadrons rejoined, and both

Imperial Guards met in full career. “Again we charged,” says Rapp, “and

this charge was terrible. It was one of the most desperate cavalry

combats ever fought, and lasted several minutes. The brave Morland,

Colonel of the mounted Chasseurs of the Guard, fell by my side. We

fought man to man, and so mingled together that the infantry on neither

side dared fire, lest they should kill their own men.” They fought it

out until the Russians gave back and broke and fled--in full sight of

the Czar and the Austrian Emperor, who from some rising ground near by

had been spectators of the desperate affray.

The survivors of the hapless First Battalion of the 4th of the Line

had meanwhile recovered themselves. Rallied by their officers, they

had been brought back into the battle. They returned with their nerve

restored, now only anxious to make amends for the disgrace they had

brought on the Grand Army. They were in time to join in the final

advance beyond the Pratzen heights and cross bayonets with an Austrian

regiment, from which they took its two standards. That feat, as will be

seen, was to serve them in good stead later on.

The charge of the Cavalry of the Guard practically decided the fate

of the day at Austerlitz. Napoleon at once brought up Oudinot’s

Grenadiers, Bernadotte’s battalions, and the regiments of the Old Guard

to further reinforce Soult’s divisions. The Allied centre was shattered

and driven in at all points, and forced back for a mile-and-a-half

beyond the field of battle. It resisted desperately to the last, and

several fierce counter-attacks were made; but in vain.

[Sidenote: THE DOG THAT SAVED AN EAGLE]

In one of these the Eagle of the Chasseurs à Pied of the Imperial

Guard had a narrow escape. According to the story it was saved by

a dog--“Moustache,” a mongrel poodle that had attached himself to

the corps and become a regimental pet. The Eagle-bearer of the

First Battalion, to whom the dog was much attached, and whom he was

following, was shot, and the Eagle dropped to the ground beneath the

man’s body. An Austrian regiment was making a counter-attack at that

point, and before the Eagle could be picked up, three Austrian soldiers

ran forward to seize it. Two of them attacked the two men of the Eagle

escort. The third was faced by “Moustache,” who kept him off, growling

savagely and snapping at the Austrian from behind the dead body of the

Eagle-bearer. The man dropped his musket, drew his hanger, and cut at

“Moustache,” slicing off a paw. But in spite of that the dog managed

to keep him off until assistance came. Then the three Austrians were

bayoneted and the Eagle was saved. Marshal Lannes, on hearing the

story, had a silver collar made for “Moustache,” with a medal to hang

from it, inscribed on one side, “Il perdit une jambe à la bataille

d’Austerlitz, et sauva le Drapeau de son régiment”; and on the other,

“Moustache, chien Français; qu’il soit partout respecté et cheri comme

un Brave.” “Moustache,” in the end, it may be said, died a soldier’s

death. He was killed by an English cannon-ball at Badajoz, and was

buried on the ramparts there, with a stone over him, inscribed: “Cy git

le brave Moustache.”

The Allied centre broken through, the end came on swiftly all over the

field of battle.

On Napoleon’s left wing, Lannes and Murat had engaged the Russian rear

column (or right wing as they fronted to fight) immediately after Soult

opened the main attack. They had done their part by holding in play

the enemy in front, thus preventing the Allied troops on that side

from moving up to reinforce the centre. There, too, as elsewhere, the

Eagles of Napoleon’s battalions fulfilled their \_rôle\_; one Eagle in

particular, that of the 13me Légère, achieving special distinction.

When the Allied centre gave way, Lannes and Murat pressed forward

impetuously, forcing their antagonists back, and driving them off the

field to the north-east, past the village of Austerlitz.

Davout, on Napoleon’s right, finished his task at the same time; in no

less workmanship fashion. As Soult swung round his victorious divisions

to the right to take the Russian left wing in rear, Davout’s moment

came and he gave the order to advance. Surging forward with exultant

shouts the stout-hearted defenders of that fiercely contested side of

the field swept down on the assailants they had kept at bay for five

long hours. The Russians did their best to make a brave resistance, but

the day was lost. Formed in close-packed columns they fell back, losing

guns and colours, and hundreds of prisoners.[9]

[Sidenote: VICTORS AND VANQUISHED]

As darkness closed in, the last shots were fired at Austerlitz.

Crushing and complete had been the overthrow. The Allied army fled

in wild panic. It left on the field 30,000 men, dead, wounded, or

prisoners, 100 guns, and 400 ammunition caissons. Forty-five standards

were in the hands of the victors. Twelve thousand men in killed and

wounded was the price Napoleon paid. It was a big price; but the

victory to him was worth the sacrifice. At five next morning an aide

de camp from the Austrian Emperor presented himself before Napoleon to

beg for an immediate suspension of hostilities. The Emperor Francis

himself had an interview with Napoleon during that afternoon, and, as

the result, terms of peace--to include the Austrian Emperor’s Russian

allies--were mutually agreed on; to be formally settled between the

diplomatists as soon as possible, Pressburg in Hungary being named for

the meeting-place.

We come now to the dramatic sequel to Austerlitz which awaited the

ill-fated First Battalion of the 4th of the Line. They had to face

Napoleon and render account to him personally for the loss of their

Eagle. The dreaded interview came some three weeks later; at a grand

parade of Soult’s corps before the Emperor at Schönbrunn--as it befell,

on Christmas Day.

Napoleon, attended by the Imperial Staff, most of the marshals, half

a hundred other officers of rank, and nearly as many aides de camp,

passed down the long line of troops, congratulating most of the

regiments on the parts they had individually taken on the different

battlefields. In due course the Emperor came to the regiments of

Vandamme’s division, ranged in their allotted place, the 4th of the

Line among them. Its First Battalion, reduced by the disaster to a

quarter of the normal strength, stood at the head of the regiment,

looking gloomy and disconsolate, the only corps on parade without its

Eagle.

Napoleon approached the place with a frown on his face and a look as

black as thunder. He reined up opposite the battalion and addressed it

in a loud angry tone.

“Soldiers,” he began hoarsely. “What have you done with the Eagle which

I entrusted to you?”

The colonel of the regiment replied that the Eagle-bearer had been

killed at Austerlitz in the \_mêlée\_ when the Russian cuirassiers

charged the regiment, and the Eagle had been lost in the tumult and

confusion of the moment. There was no survivor of those who had seen

the Eagle-bearer fall. The battalion, indeed, did not know of its loss

until some time later. One and all deeply deplored what had happened,

but they desired to inform His Majesty most respectfully that they,

single-handed, had captured two Austrian standards, and implored his

consideration on that account, begging that he would allow them to

receive a new Eagle in exchange.

The whole regiment supported the colonel’s request with loud shouts,

“réclama à grands cris.” But Napoleon’s countenance remained unchanged.

[Sidenote: SCATHING CENSURE AND BITTER SCORN]

He replied coldly and contemptuously: “These two foreign flags do not

return me my Eagle!” Then, after a pause, he launched out into words of

the severest censure and rebuke, telling the men that he had seen them

with his own eyes in flight at Austerlitz. He poured bitter scorn on

their conduct, “in phrases, stinging, burning, corrosive, which those

present remembered long afterwards--to the end of their lives.”

Again the unhappy colonel pleaded his hardest for his men. He entreated

the Emperor’s clemency, once more beseeching Napoleon to allow that

they had wiped out the slur on their good name, and to grant the

battalion a new Eagle.

Napoleon said nothing for a moment. Then he again addressed them in an

abrupt tone:

“Officers, sub-officers, and soldiers, swear to me here that not one of

you saw your Eagle fall. Assure me that if you had done so you would

have flung yourselves into the midst of the enemy to recover it, or

have died in the attempt. The soldier who loses his Eagle on the field

of battle loses his honour and his all.”

“We swear it!” came the reply at once.

At that there seemed to come a change in the Emperor’s mood. He paused

once more for a few moments, during which there was dead silence. Then

he raised his voice: “I will grant that you have not been cowards;

but you have been imprudent! Again I tell you that these Austrian

standards--even, indeed, were they six--would not compensate me for my

Eagle.”

He stopped short. He seemed to be musing for a moment, looking straight

into the eyes of the men. After that, with a curt “Well, I will restore

you yet another Eagle!” Napoleon turned his horse and rode on down the

line of troops.

[Sidenote: THEY FOUND THE OTHER EAGLE]

It was quite true, as the colonel told Napoleon, that the regiment

was unaware at the time that their Eagle had been lost. As a

fact, search-parties--practically all the survivors of the First

Battalion--were out on the day after Austerlitz hunting over the

battlefield among the dead for their lost Eagle. By the irony of fate

it was they who picked up and restored the Eagle of the 24th Light

Infantry to their fellows in adversity; the Russians, it would seem,

had not marked its fall in the confusion of the fighting. At any rate

it was left where it fell and where it was found.

There was, as it curiously happened, no reference in the Austerlitz

Bulletin published in France--the 30th “Bulletin of the Grand Army”--to

the loss of its Eagle by the 4th of the Line, although the disaster to

the battalion is reported. “Un bataillon du 4me de Ligne fut chargé

par la Garde Impériale Russe à Cheval et culbuté.” That was all that

was said on the subject. Yet, on other occasions later, when Eagles

were lost, mention was made of the misfortune in one or other of the

Bulletins, with, generally also, some remark by way of explaining away

the unpleasant fact, and now and then a caustic comment by Napoleon.

A picture connected with the incident was, however, painted--at whose

request is unknown. It is now in the national collection of military

pictures of the campaigns of Napoleon at Versailles. It shows the First

Battalion of the 4th of the Line at the Schönbrunn review “presenting

Napoleon with two Austrian standards taken by them from the enemy, and

claiming in exchange a new Eagle for themselves.”[10]

This closing word may be said of the spoils of the Eagles at Austerlitz.

[Sidenote: THE RECEPTION IN NOTRE DAME]

The forty-five flags captured in the battle, with five others selected

from those taken at Ulm, making fifty in all, were presented by

Napoleon to the Cathedral of Notre Dame. With the trophies he sent this

message: “Our intention is that every year on the 2nd of December a

Solemn Office shall be sung in the Cathedral in memory of the brave men

who fell on the great day.” The flags were borne in triumph, together

with the trophies of the Ulm campaign,--120 captured standards and

colours in all--through the streets of Paris on January 15, 1806, amid

a tremendous demonstration of popular enthusiasm. “The behaviour of

the people,” wrote Cambacérès, “resembled intoxication.” Four days

later the Austerlitz flags were received at Notre Dame by the assembled

Cathedral clergy, Cardinal du Belloy at their head, with elaborate

religious ceremonial.

Said the Cardinal-Archbishop of Paris in his address from the

Altar-steps: “These banners, suspended from the roof of our Cathedral,

will attest to posterity the efforts of Europe in arms against us;

the great achievements of our soldiers; the protection of Heaven over

France; the prodigious successes of our invincible Emperor; and the

homage which he pays to God for his victories.” Not one of the flags

exists now. They disappeared mysteriously, in circumstances to be

described later, in the early hours of March 31, 1814, the day on

which the victorious Allies entered Paris, and Napoleon withdrew to

Fontainebleau.

Fifty-four of the other trophies paraded through Paris, flags taken in

the Ulm campaign, were presented by Napoleon, as has been said, to

the Senate. In return a picture of the scene at the reception of the

trophy-flags was ordered to be painted for presentation to the Emperor.

It is now at Versailles.

The remaining sixteen trophies were divided by order of the Emperor.

Eight were sent to the Assembly Hall of the Tribunate; eight to the

Hôtel de Ville as a gift to the city of Paris.

Thus did France receive the first spoils of the Eagles.

“Soldiers,” said Napoleon to the Grand Army, in his Austerlitz

Proclamation; “I am satisfied with you. You have justified my fullest

expectations of your intrepidity. You have decorated your Eagles with

immortal glory!”

CHAPTER V

IN THE SECOND CAMPAIGN

JENA AND THE TRIUMPH OF BERLIN

The curtain rises this time on an act in the War Drama of the Eagles

unique in the startling incidents of its historic \_dénoûment\_.

Prussia, in September 1806, threw down the gage to Napoleon and drew

the sword for a trial of strength, with the full assurance of victory.

There was no doubt in Germany as to the issue; not the least anxiety

was felt. No troops in the world, declared one and all, could stand up

to the Prussian Army. It was easy, they said at Potsdam and Berlin, to

account for what had happened last year on the Danube. Any sort of army

could have won in that war. Timidity and want of skill in the Austrian

generals, deficient training in the men, had been, beyond dispute, the

reason of the disasters. It would be otherwise now. Napoleon would have

to meet this time the Army of Prussia; the best drilled and smartest

soldiers in the world, organised and trained under the system that the

Great Frederick had originated and himself brought to perfection.

“His Majesty the King,” said one of the Prussian generals, addressing

a parade at Potsdam, “has many generals better than Napoleon!” In the

Prussian Army, from veteran field-marshal to drummer-boy, there were

no two opinions as to what must be the outcome of a clash of arms with

France. The wings of Napoleon’s Eagles would be clipped once for all.

But to hurl defiant words was not enough. Yet further to display

contempt for their French foes, the young officers of the Prussian

Guard marched one night in procession through the streets of Berlin to

demonstrate in front of the French Embassy. Shouting out insults and

jeers, they brandished their swords before the windows of the mansion

and made a show of sharpening the blades on the Ambassador’s doorsteps.

The Prussian King’s ultimatum went forth, couched in language there was

no mistaking, and the Royal Guard Corps set out from the capital for

the frontier with flags displayed and their bands playing triumphal

airs, chanting songs of the victories of the Great Frederick, and

shouting themselves hoarse with cries of “Nach Paris!” All over Prussia

it was the same. The marching regiments tramped through the towns and

villages, their colours decked with flowers, their bands playing, and

with the swaggering gait of victors returning from conquest.

[Sidenote: A REPLY WITHIN A WEEK]

The Prussian ultimatum, delivered on September 1, haughtily demanded

a reply from France within a week. It was accepted with alacrity.

Napoleon had foreseen all and laid his plans. “Marshal,” he said to

Berthier, with a grim smile, as he read the ultimatum, “they have given

us a rendezvous for the 8th; never did Frenchman refuse such an appeal.”

The Eagles never swooped to more deadly purpose, with results more

amazing and more dramatic, than in that campaign.

Within three days of the firing of the first shot, a Prussian division

of 9,000 men had been routed with heavy loss at Schleitz in Thuringia;

and Murat’s cavalry had captured elsewhere great part of the Prussian

reserve baggage-trains and pontoon equipment. On the fourth day of the

war, at Saalfeld in Thuringia, 1,200 Prussian prisoners were taken and

30 guns. In the battles of Jena and Auerstadt, both fought on the same

day, October 14, 20,000 Prussian prisoners, 200 guns, and 25 standards

were spoils to the Eagles. At Erfurth, on the next day, a Prussian

field-marshal with 14,000 men, 120 guns and the whole of the grand

park of the reserve artillery of the army were taken. At Halle 4,000

Prussian prisoners were taken, with 30 guns; at Lübeck 8,000 prisoners

and 40 guns. Magdeburg, one of the strongest fortresses in Europe, with

immense magazines and 600 guns on the ramparts garrisoned by 16,000

troops, surrendered after a few hours’ partial bombardment. Stettin, a

first-class fortress mounting 150 guns, with a garrison of 6,000 men,

surrendered without firing a shot. The strong fortress of Cüstrin on

the Oder, with 4,000 men in garrison and 90 cannon on the ramparts,

surrendered, also without firing a shot, to a solitary French infantry

regiment with four guns. The fortress of Spandau, garrisoned by 6,000

men, hauled down its flag and opened its gates to a squadron of French

hussars, no other French troops being within many miles, bluffed into

surrender. Within twelve days of Jena, Napoleon had made his entry as a

conqueror into Berlin, and the Prussian Army had ceased to exist. “We

have arrived in Potsdam and Berlin,” announced Napoleon in a Bulletin

to the Grand Army, “sooner than the renown of our victories! We have

made 60,000 prisoners, taken 65 standards, including those of the Royal

Guard, 600 pieces of cannon, 3 fortresses, 20 generals, half of our

army having to regret that they have not had an opportunity of firing a

shot. All the Prussian provinces from the Elbe to the Oder are in our

hands.” Before the end of the year, in little more than three months

from the firing of the first shot, a total of 100,000 prisoners, 4,000

cannon, 6 first-class fortresses, and many smaller ones, were in the

hands of the victors.

[Sidenote: RUIN, SWIFT AND IRREPARABLE]

Never had the world witnessed such an overthrow in war, so complete

and appalling a catastrophe. Two battles sufficed to prostrate Prussia

and annihilate the model army of Frederick the Great: the twin battles

of Jena and Auerstadt, both fought, as has been said, on the same

day, October 14, and within ten miles of one another. Jena was fought

under Napoleon’s own eye; Auerstadt by Marshal Davout, practically

single-handed, with his one army corps confronting the King and

Blücher with the main Prussian army. The Prussian generals indeed

gave themselves into Napoleon’s hands at the outset. They separated

their main army into two bodies out of touch with each other, in the

immediate presence of the enemy. Ruin, swift and irreparable, was the

penalty. At Jena, Prince Hohenlohe’s army was flung roughly back and

dashed to pieces, its scattered remnants flying in wild disorder. At

Auerstadt, Davout defeated numbers nearly double his own, through the

confused tactics of the Prussian generals. Immediately after that

came on the \_débâcle\_. The Prussian Auerstadt army was falling back,

disheartened and demoralised, but still in fair military formation to

a large extent, when, all of a sudden, not having had up to then the

least inkling of what had happened at Jena, the retreating troops came

upon the shattered fragments of Hohenlohe’s battalions, streaming in

wild confusion across their path; masses of fugitives running for

their lives in frantic panic before the sabres of Murat’s pursuing

cavalry. That ended everything for the Prussian army in five minutes.

The sight of their fugitive comrades struck confusion and sheer fright

into the retreating columns from Auerstadt. All order was instantly

lost: the soldiers threw away their arms and spread over the country in

headlong rout. And there was no means of stopping it. In their blind

self-confidence the Prussian generals had made no arrangements in

the event of a reverse. No line of retreat had been arranged for, no

rallying-point had been thought of. “The disaster of a single day made

an end of the Prussian army as a force capable of meeting the enemy in

the field.”

For the Eagles it was a day of adventures on both battlefields. Swiftly

alternating rushes forward, the Eagles showing the way at the head

of their regiments at one moment; hasty halts to form in rallying

squares, the Eagles in the midst, the next moment, to check the

incessant Prussian cavalry counter-charges--that was what the fighting

on the French side was like, all through the day, at both Jena and

Auerstadt. At one time the Eagles were leading forward charging lines

of exultantly cheering men, firing fast and racing forward at the \_pas

de charge\_; immediately afterwards they were standing fast, each the

centre of a mass of breathless and excited soldiers, surging round and

closing up to form square, with bristling bayonets levelled on every

side, to hold the ground they had won against the charging squadrons of

Prussian horsemen that came at them, thundering down impetuously at the

gallop.

[Sidenote: “LEAD OUT YOUR EAGLE!”]

“I want to see the Eagles well to the front to-day!” said Napoleon

to several regiments in turn, as he rode at early dawn along the

lines of Marshal Soult’s two foremost divisions who were to open the

attack at Jena. To them the task had been appointed to push forward

in advance, and hold the exits from the narrow defiles through which

the French troops had to pass, before reaching the Prussians on the

high ground beyond, in order to give time to the main army, following

close in rear, to deploy and form in battle order. “Lead out your

Eagle, Sixty-fourth!” Napoleon said to one of the regiments told off

to go forward in the forefront of all. “I wish to-day to see the Eagle

of the Sixty-fourth lead the battle on the field of honour!” How that

Eagle led its regiment, how those who fought under it did their duty,

the prized honour of special mention in the Jena Bulletin of the Grand

Army, and a shower of crosses of the Legion of Honour, distributed

among all ranks, bore testimony. Five times did the Eagle of the 34th,

the regiment fighting next to the 64th, lead a charge, each charge

crossing bayonets with the enemy, twice in hand-to-hand fight with the

picked corps of the Prussian Grenadiers.

It was on the battlefield of Jena that Marshal Ney won his historic

sobriquet of “The Bravest of the Brave.” He personally led forward his

attack, with, at either side of him, the Eagles of the 18th of the

Line, the 32nd, and the 96th. Carried away by his impetuous valour,

soon after the opening of the battle, Ney made his attack with only at

hand the three regiments of his First Division. The other two divisions

of Ney’s corps had not yet reached the field. A regiment of cuirassiers

headed the column, and at their first charge captured 13 Prussian guns;

but the Prussian cavalry, charging back at once to recover the guns,

overpowered the cuirassiers.

“The Prussian cavalry broke the French horse, and enveloped the

infantry in such numbers as would inevitably have proved fatal to

less resolute troops; but the brave marshal instantly formed his men

into squares, threw himself into one of them, and there maintained

the combat by a rolling fire on all sides, till Napoleon, who saw his

danger, sent several regiments of horse, under Bertrand, who disengaged

him from his perilous situation.”

Ney’s other troops then joined the marshal, coming up with their Eagles

gleaming through the battle-smoke: the Eagles of the 39th and the

69th, of the 76th, the 27th, and the 59th. Ney, extricated from his

difficulties, went on again at once. “With intrepid step he ascended

the hill, and, after a sharp conflict, stormed the important village

of Vierzehn-Heiligen, in the centre of the Prussian position. In vain

Hohenlohe formed the flower of his troops to regain the post; in

vain these brave men advanced in parade order, and with unshrinking

firmness, through a storm of musketry and grape; the troops of Lannes

came up to Ney’s support, and the French established themselves in such

strength in the village as to render all subsequent attempts for its

recapture abortive.”

[Sidenote: LET THEM COME ON!]

This was the spirit in which, at Jena, Ney’s men fought under the

Eagles. One instance will suffice. The 76th of the Line, after the

village of Vierzehn-Heiligen had been taken, were in the act of

advancing across the open to a fresh attack, when a charge of Prussian

cavalry swept fiercely down on them. The regiment formed in square,

each battalion rallying round its Eagle, held up aloft for all to

gather round. The Prussians had come up suddenly. They were within

150 yards before the 76th were ready. Then the 76th were ordered to

“present” and fire. Instead of doing that, the men, as if moved by one

common impulse, took off their shakos, stuck them on their bayonets,

and waved them in the air, with defiant cheers of “Vive l’Empereur!”

“Donnez feu, mes enfants! Donnez feu!” (“Fire, men, fire!”) shouted out

their colonel, Lannier, anxious lest the enemy should get too near.

“We have time: at fifteen paces, Colonel; wait and see!” came back in

answer from the ranks. They did wait, and, at just fifteen paces, fired

a crashing volley which so staggered the Prussians that, leaving half

their men on the ground, they turned and galloped back.

The regiments of Lannes’ corps, with the fiery marshal cantering at

their head and waving them on, cocked hat in hand, entered the battle

with drums beating and the Eagles proudly displayed in the centre of

the leading lines.

[Sidenote: “HERE IS THE COU-COU!”]

One regiment lost 28 officers and 400 men. It had made good its first

attack and was advancing to a second, when it was charged in the open

by the Prussian cavalry, while in the act of forming square. It all

but lost its Eagle. The Eagle-bearer was cut down, and the Eagle was

broken from its staff in the trampling tumult of horsemen intermingled

with infantry, savagely fighting with their bayonets. A soldier saved

the Eagle, and in the hurry of the moment stuffed it into the pocket

of his long overcoat. Then he went on fighting. Apparently the man had

no time or opportunity to think of the Eagle again. The regiment was

re-forming towards the close of the battle, when Napoleon himself,

riding across the ground near them, with his quick glance, missed the

Eagle. He cantered up to the spot, and, on being told by an officer

that he did not know where it was, angrily accused the men of having

lost their Eagle on the field. He began upbraiding them indignantly:

“What is this? Where is your Eagle? You have brought disgrace on the

Army by losing your Eagle!” Those were his opening words. He was rating

the men angrily, when he was abruptly interrupted by a voice from the

ranks. “No, your Majesty, no! they did not get it: they only got a

piece of the bâton! Here is the Cou-cou! I put it in my pocket!” The

soldier drew out the Eagle as he spoke and held it up. There was a

loud outburst of laughter from the soldiers at the unexpected turn of

events, amid which Napoleon, without a word more, turned and rode off

elsewhere.

At Auerstadt, where 30,000 French faced and defeated 60,000 Prussians,

the fighting was even fiercer than at Jena. Recklessly the Prussian

horsemen, led in person by the dauntless Blücher, repeatedly charged

down on the French, who formed in square everywhere to beat them back,

They did so at all points, and the Prussians only wrecked themselves

beyond recovery by their efforts. In vain did the Prussian cavalry, as

at Jena, gallop up to the French bayonets again and again. “In vain

these gallant cavaliers, with headlong fury, drove their steeds up to

the very muzzles of the French muskets. In vain they rode round and

enveloped their squares: ceaseless was the rolling fire which issued

from those flaming walls: impenetrable the hedge of bayonets which, the

front rank kneeling, presented to their advances.” Erect in the centre

of each French battalion square glittered its Eagle, raised on high

defiantly above the smoke as the volleys flashed out all round.

Marshal Davout was seen at every point wherever the regiments were

hardest pressed. From square to square the marshal galloped, as

opportunity offered in the intervals of the Prussian attacks, “his face

begrimed with sweat and powder-smoke, his spectacles gone,[11] his bald

head bleeding from a wound, his uniform torn, a piece of his cocked hat

shot away,” to exhort the men to stand fast and hold their ground. To

one regiment he called out, as he reined up beside its square: “Their

Great Frederick said that God gave the victory to the big battalions.

He lied! It’s the stubborn soldiers who win battles; that’s you and

your general to-day!” Davout personally brought up support at one

point to rescue a sorely pressed division of four regiments, General

Gudin’s,[12] holding the village of Herrenhausen, on the right of the

battlefield; a post of vital importance to the fate of the day. Taken

by a brilliant dash forward early in the battle, the village was held

to the last, in spite of the utmost endeavours of the Prussians to

regain it.

[Illustration: MARSHAL DAVOUT.]

[Sidenote: AT BAY BEHIND A BARRICADE]

The French kept the post at the cost of half their numbers. One

regiment, the 85th, on the side of the village fronting the Prussians,

lost two-thirds of its men and was forced back and compelled to abandon

the outskirts. It kept the Prussians at bay, however, within the

village, behind a barricade of overturned carts, farm implements, and

cottage furniture heaped together. Close behind the firing line across

the village street the Eagle-bearer took his stand, amidst a hail of

bullets, mounted on a wheelbarrow and brandishing the Eagle and calling

on the men to stand firm and fire low.

Marshal Davout brought up his First Division of five regiments to

rescue Gudin, heading them sword in hand as he galloped forward. In

doing so he received his wound and had a narrow escape of his life.

“One bullet went through the marshal’s hat just above the cockade.”[13]

The 111th of the Line, of Davout’s Third Division, had three

Eagle-bearers shot down in succession, a fresh officer coming forward

to carry the Eagle as his predecessor fell. All the drummer-lads of the

regiment were killed, whereupon Drum-Major Mauser, dropping his staff,

picked up a drum and beat it as the regiment advanced in its final

charge. He ran forward close beside the Eagle until he in turn fell

shot dead. This was in storming the village of Spielberg, nearly at

the close of the battle.

“The corps of Marshal Davout performed prodigies,” wrote Napoleon in

the Fourth Bulletin of the campaign, commending with warmth “the rare

intrepidity of the brave corps.” He ordered 500 crosses of the Legion

of Honour to be distributed in Davout’s corps, directing that when the

army reached Berlin, Davout and the Third Corps should take precedence,

and their Eagles lead the triumphal entry through the streets of the

Prussian capital. At a special review of Davout’s corps, calling

the marshal and his generals round him, he declared his unbounded

admiration of the feat of arms they had achieved. “Sire,” replied

Davout, deeply moved at Napoleon’s words, “the soldiers of the Third

Corps will always be to you what the Tenth Legion was to Caesar.”

At the attack on Halle, three days after Jena, the 32nd of the Line,

near the Eagle of which regiment Ney had ridden at Jena, distinguished

themselves brilliantly. The Prussian Reserve Army Corps was holding

Halle and making a gallant effort in a rearguard fight to safeguard

the passage there over the river Saale. Led by the commander of Ney’s

First Division, General Dupont, in person, they stormed the bridge in

the face of a tremendous fire of grape and case shot. Then, backed up

by their comrades in Ney’s First Division, the 18th and 96th and 9th

Light Infantry, they fought their way through the city and, breaking

open the gates, stormed the heights beyond, foremost throughout in the

attack. Four times the Eagle-bearer of the 32nd was shot down: each

time a fresh officer sprang forward to lead the regiment on. The 97th

of the Line, while fighting their way through the streets of Halle at

another point, found the Prussian cannon mounted at a barricade too

deadly to face in the open, and the regiment recoiled in confusion.

Taking the Eagle from the Eagle-bearer, Colonel Barrois called forward

the grenadier company. Leading them on himself on horseback, holding up

the Eagle with his right hand, he went straight at the barricade, which

was stormed without touching a trigger.

[Sidenote: ACROSS A CONQUERED LAND]

Thenceforward there was only left for the Eagles to choose the slain;

to parade in triumph across a conquered land. “Veni, Vidi, Vici,”

sums up the story of the after-events of the war for the Eagles of

Napoleon. The army of the great Frederick committed suicide after Jena.

Its resistance collapsed: the army that had gone forth in September

to cross the Rhine and dictate peace at the gates of Paris had ceased

to exist within six weeks. How completely indeed the \_moral\_ of the

Prussians had been shattered, this story, from a report from Marshal

Lannes to Napoleon, serves to show. “Three hussars,” related Lannes,

“having lost their way towards Grätz, found themselves in the midst of

an enemy’s squadron. They boldly drew their carbines and, levelling

them at the enemy, called out that the Prussians were surrounded, and

must surrender at discretion. The Prussians obeyed. The commander of

the squadron, without apparently a thought of resistance, ordered

his men to dismount, and they surrendered their arms to those three

hussars, who brought them all in prisoners of war.”

General Lassalle, with a handful of hussars, as has been said,

captured the fortress of Stettin, with 150 guns on its walls and a

garrison of 6,000 men, by sheer effrontery. He rode up to the main

gate and demanded the surrender within five minutes; and the governor

capitulated on the spot. “If your hussars take strong fortresses like

that,” wrote Napoleon to Murat, on hearing the news, “I have nothing

to do but break up my artillery and discharge my engineers.” Prince

Hohenlohe with 14,000 men and 50 guns, his troops including the Royal

Prussian Guard and six regiments of Guard cavalry, laid down their

arms at Prentzlau. A few miles away, 8,000 more Prussians surrendered

on the same day to a French brigade of dragoons. The unfortunates

were remnants of the troops beaten at Jena, and had been relentlessly

pursued for ten days.

The 7th Hussars forwarded to Napoleon as their spoils from a three

days’ chase, 7 Prussian cavalry standards; those of the Anspach and

Bayreuth Dragoons; the Queen of Prussia’s regiment; and 4 standards

of the Light Cavalry of the Guard. Marshal Lannes sent Napoleon 40

Prussian standards taken between Jena and Berlin. Bernadotte and Soult

presented 82 more trophies, the spoils of Blücher’s army, forced to

surrender at Lübeck after a forlorn-hope fight in the course of which

the city was stormed.

[Sidenote: “THE FINEST FEAT OF ARMS”]

Marshal Ney took the fortress of Magdeburg without having a single

siege-gun, and with only 11,000 men at hand to deal with 24,000 in the

garrison and 700 guns on the ramparts, some of these being the heaviest

artillery of the time. It was perhaps the most surprising event of the

war. The taking of Magdeburg, wrote Junot, “is the finest feat of arms

that has illustrated this campaign.” Ney had been ordered to blockade

Magdeburg until a sufficient army was available for the siege of the

fortress, which Napoleon expected would be a long and difficult affair.

But so tedious a task as a blockade was not at all to Ney’s taste.

To hasten matters he sent for half a dozen mortars, taken at Erfurt,

and began throwing shells into the suburbs on the side nearest him.

The bombardment caused a scare among the townsfolk. Panic-stricken at

seeing their houses set on fire and destroyed by the bursting shells,

they hastened to General Kleist, the governor of Magdeburg, an elderly

and nervous old gentleman of between seventy and eighty years of

age, and implored him to ask terms of the French marshal. Dismayed

himself at the prospect of a siege, with disorder rampant among the

military--nearly half the garrison was made up of fragments of fugitive

regiments from Jena who had fled to Magdeburg for shelter from the

pursuing French--Kleist, losing his nerve in the face of the alarming

situation, agreed to negotiate for terms. Ney’s reply was a demand for

instant surrender, whereupon the wretched governor, although he had

more than enough good troops at disposal, without counting the Jena

fugitives, to have made a stubborn defence, tamely hoisted the white

flag.

The march out of the garrison of Magdeburg was a repetition of the

Austrian humiliation of Ulm on a lesser scale. The standards of the

Black Eagle in their turn had at Magdeburg publicly to acknowledge

defeat before the Eagles of Napoleon.

[Sidenote: THE GARRISON LAYS DOWN ARMS]

Ney drew up his 11,000 men in a great hollow square outside the Ulrich

gate of the fortress. His troops were drawn up along three sides of

the square; the fourth side, that nearest the city, being left open.

In front of the regiments stood their Eagles, all paraded as at Ulm,

the Eagle-guards beside them, and the regimental officers standing in

line with their swords at the carry. The Prussians marched out and, to

the music of the French bands, passed in procession along the three

inner sides of the square, and in front of Marshal Ney and his staff.

The miserable Kleist led them, and then took his stand beside Ney, to

answer the marshal’s questions as to who and what the various regiments

were, as each set of downcast Prussians trailed past. They tramped by,

with their muskets on their shoulders unloaded and without bayonets,

and with their colours furled. The hapless prisoners, after they had

defiled past, were at once marched away under escort on the road to

Mayence. Twenty generals, 800 other officers, 22,000 infantry, and

2,000 artillerymen, with 59 standards, underwent the humiliation of the

defilade.[14] There were several painful scenes at the laying down of

the arms. “Their soldiers openly insulted their officers,” describes

one of the French lookers-on. “Most of them looked terribly ashamed of

themselves; the faces of not a few were streaming with tears.”

At Magdeburg, as in the other surrenders elsewhere, it was not the

personal courage of the officers and soldiers that was wanting--there

were men by thousands in the various garrisons ready to give their

lives for the honour of their country; it was the generals in command

whose nerve lacked. The generals were men past their prime, and mostly

physically incapable of enduring hardships. They had been appointed to

their posts, in accordance with the system in vogue in Prussia, for the

sake of the emoluments.

“The overthrow of Jena,” to use the words of a modern writer, “had been

caused by faults of generalship, and cast no stain upon the courage

of the officers; the surrender of the Prussian fortresses, which

began on the day when the French entered Berlin, attached the utmost

personal disgrace to their commanders. Even after the destruction of

the army in the field, Prussia’s situation would not have been hopeless

if the commanders of the fortresses had acted on the ordinary rules

of military duty. Magdeburg and the strongholds upon the Oder were

sufficiently armed and provisioned to detain the entire French army,

and to give time to the King to collect upon the Vistula a force as

numerous as that which he had lost. But whatever is weakest in human

nature--old age, fear, and credulity--seemed to have been placed at the

head of the Prussian defences.” Küstrin on the Oder, “in full order for

a long siege, was surrendered by the older officers, amidst the curses

of the subalterns and the common soldiers: the artillerymen had to be

dragged from their guns by force.”

At Magdeburg, indeed, before the march out, the younger officers of the

garrison mobbed General Kleist, hooting at him and cursing him to his

face; some of them, further, being with difficulty stopped from acts of

personal violence.

There yet remained one day more for the Eagles. The triumphal parade of

the victorious Eagles through Berlin was the crowning humiliation that

Napoleon imposed on vanquished Prussia.

[Sidenote: MARSHAL DAVOUT IN BERLIN]

Davout’s corps, as Napoleon had promised, marched through the Prussian

capital first of all. The marshal was waited on as he entered by the

Burgomeister and civic authorities, humbly bowing before him, and

offering in token of submission the keys of Berlin. The offer, however,

was declined. “You must present them later,” was the reply; “they

belong to a greater than I!” After marching through Berlin, Davout

camped a mile beyond the city, posting his artillery “in position as

for war, pointed towards the place as in readiness to bombard it.” The

soldiers were then allowed to go about Berlin in parties. They behaved

very quietly, and made eager sightseers, we are told. The shops,

which had been closed during the march through, reopened later, and

the people went about the streets as usual, “mortified and subdued in

demeanour, but apparently very curious to see what they could of the

French officers.”

Augereau’s corps, and then those of Soult, Bernadotte, and Ney made

their triumphal entry and march through Berlin in turn, on different

days later on, bands playing and Eagles displayed at the head of the

regiments--the people turning out on each occasion in crowds to line

the streets and gaze at the show, “expressing great surprise at the

small size of our men and the youth of most of the officers.” Marshal

Ney’s corps brought with them their fifty-nine trophies from Magdeburg,

and, after parading them through the streets of Berlin, ceremoniously

presented them to Napoleon in public, in front of the statue of

Frederick the Great.

Napoleon himself made his triumphal entry into Berlin on October 28,

three days after Davout’s march through. He rode from Charlottenburg

through the Brandenburg Gate and along Unter-den-Linden to the Royal

Palace, at the head of the Old Guard and six thousand cuirassiers in

gleaming mail. Squadrons of Gendarmerie d’Elite and Chasseurs of the

Guard and the Horse Grenadiers, in their huge bear-skins, led the long

procession, all in \_grande tenue\_, with their bands playing and the

Eagles glittering in the brilliant sunshine of a perfect autumn day.

Napoleon came next, “riding by himself, twenty paces in front of the

staff, with impassive face and a stern expression,” passing amid dense

silent crowds, “the men all wearing black, as in mourning; the women

mostly with handkerchiefs to their eyes.” The people lined both sides

of the roadway, and filled the windows of all the houses overlooking

the route. All Berlin, young and old, was in the streets that day,

staring at the spectacle in mute silence, looking on dumbly, pale-faced

and miserable of aspect. Not a mutter of abuse was heard, not the least

sign was apparent of the deadly hatred to their conqueror that one and

all felt. With rage and despair in their hearts, with compressed lips

and clenched fists at their sides, the men watched the splendid array

sweep proudly past them in all the insolent pomp of victorious war.

[Sidenote: NAPOLEON RIDES THROUGH]

For once, on that historic occasion, Napoleon discarded his customary

wear of the green undress uniform of his pet corps, the Chasseurs of

the Guard. He entered Berlin as the head of a conquering army, wearing

the full-dress uniform of a French general, crimson plumed cocked hat

with blue and white aigrette, blue coat heavily embroidered with gold,

and with glittering bullion epaulettes, and the blue and gold sash of

a general round his waist. Four marshals, Berthier, Lannes, Davout,

and Augereau, riding abreast, followed Napoleon, immediately in front

of the Imperial Staff, a cavalcade of a hundred and more brilliantly

decorated officers, all in their most gorgeous parade uniforms, in

celebration of the day. The keys of the city were presented to the

conqueror, and accepted by him, as Napoleon passed through the

Brandenburg Gate. Ten thousand infantry of the Old Guard, in a vast

solid column of glistening bayonets, marched, twenty abreast, in rear

of the staff. Their famous band playing triumphantly, with the Eagle

of the Grenadiers of the Old Guard above its flag of crimson silk

and gold, heading the veterans. They also were all in the full-dress

uniform they wore on gala-day parades before the Tuileries. By

Napoleon’s special order, the Old Guard on all campaigns carried in

their knapsacks their full-dress uniform, specially for donning on

occasions such as that at Berlin.

But the cup of humiliation for the miserable citizens of the Prussian

capital was not yet full. They had yet another military spectacle with

a significance of its own to witness; one the deep humiliation of which

they felt more bitterly even than Napoleon’s triumphant ride in person

through their streets. The citizens of Berlin had to look on their own

officers of the Royal Prussian Guard being led in procession through

their midst under the armed escort of Napoleon’s grenadiers. That was

Napoleon’s way of settling accounts for that August night of wanton

insult to France, for the sharpening of the sword-blades on the steps

of the French Embassy.

[Sidenote: THE PRISONERS FARMED OUT]

Nor, too, did Napoleon spare the Prussian prisoners of the rank and

file. Writing from Berlin to the Minister of the Interior in Paris,

he gave directions that the Prussian captives should be made use of

as hewers of wood and drawers of water for their conquerors. They

were to be farmed out to municipalities and district councils in the

Departments. “Their services should be turned to account at a trifling

expense in the way of wages for the benefit of our manufacturers and

cultivators and replace our conscripts called to serve in the ranks of

the Grand Army.”

Napoleon stayed in Berlin for four weeks, while the marshals were

leading the Eagles through Eastern Prussia towards the Polish frontier.

Russia had taken up the cause of her defeated neighbour, and the armies

of the Czar were on the move to rescue what was left of the Prussian

army. Less than 15,000 men were all that remained in the field to show

fight, of 200,000 soldiers who, not two months before, had been on the

march against France in full anticipation of victory.

In the Royal Palace of Berlin Napoleon received with elaborate

ceremony the deputation of the French Senate sent from Paris specially

to congratulate the victor of Jena in the enemy’s capital. He took

advantage of the unique occasion for the formal presentation and

handing over to their charge, for conveyance to Paris, of the trophies

of the war--340 Prussian battle-flags and standards.[15] Forty of the

trophies presented to the Senate on that day at Berlin are now among

the array of trophies grouped round Napoleon’s tomb in the Invalides.

Napoleon handed over to the charge of the deputation at the same time,

for transfer to the Invalides, his own personal spoil--the sword of

Frederick the Great. It was removed--all the world knows the story of

the unpardonable outrage--by Napoleon’s own hand from its resting-place

on the royal tomb at Potsdam. “I would rather have this,” he said to

the officers beside him in the royal vault as he took possession of the

sword, “than twenty millions. I shall send it to my old soldiers who

fought against Frederick in the campaign in Hanover. I will present it

to the Governor of the Invalides, who will guard it as a testimonial of

the victories of the Grand Army and the vengeance that it has wreaked

for the disaster of Rosbach. My veterans will be pleased to see the

sword of the man who defeated them at Rosbach!”

[Sidenote: FREDERICK THE GREAT’S SWORD]

The trophies started for France forthwith under military escort, and

Paris went mad with exultation at the sight of them. On the day of the

State Procession which escorted the trophies from the Tuileries to

the Invalides it proved almost impossible to keep back the enormous

crowds that thronged the streets along the route, in spite of cordons

of gendarmerie and regiments of dragoons. Deputations of veterans and

National Guards, with the Eagles of the Departmental Legions, led the

way. Then came Imperial carriages with exalted official personages.

The trophies had their place next, displayed in clusters of flags all

round a gigantic triumphal car. Marshal Moncey, the acting Governor

of Paris, rode a few paces behind the car of Prussian standards,

holding up the trophy of trophies before the eyes of the wildly

cheering onlookers--Frederick the Great’s sword. A gaily attired

train of generals and staff officers attended the marshal. The rear

of the procession was brought up by the battalions of the Guard of

Paris, their Eagles being borne amid rows of gleaming bayonets. Salvos

of artillery from the Triumphal Battery greeted the arrival of the

trophies at the Invalides, where the veterans awaited them, drawn up on

parade before the Gate of Honour. As Napoleon had specially directed,

the Hanoverian War veterans of the Invalides met and escorted Marshal

Moncey to the chapel at the head of other specially nominated veterans,

who bore, marching in procession, the Prussian trophy-standards. The

trophies were deposited with an elaborate display of ceremonial in

front of the High Altar, after which Fontanes, the Public Orator of

the Empire, delivered an address full of glowingly eloquent passages

on the glorious achievements of the Grand Army and the “resplendent

magnificence of the leader who had led the Eagles to surpassing

triumphs!”

THE TWELVE LOST EAGLES OF EYLAU

Napoleon passed from the victorious fields of Prussia to the rough

experiences of the Eylau and Friedland campaigns, which followed as the

sequel to Jena on the plains of the Polish frontier. The Eagles there

had to undergo under fire vicissitudes of fortune that were a foretaste

of the fate in store for some of them later on, at the hands of the

same enemy, in the Moscow campaign. No fewer than fourteen of the

Eagles borne in triumph through Berlin after Jena were on view within a

twelvemonth as spoils of war in the Kazan Cathedral at St. Petersburg.

The Eagle of Marshal Ney’s favourite regiment in the battle-days

of the Ulm campaign, the 9th Light Infantry, was the first to meet

adventures in the Polish War. It was on the occasion of the surprise

of Bernadotte’s army corps, at Möhringen near the Vistula, in the last

week of January 1807. The Grand Army was lying in winter quarters to

the north of Warsaw, awaiting the reopening of the campaign in the

early spring, when the Russian army, breaking up unexpectedly from its

cantonments beyond the Vistula in the depth of winter, made a dash at

Bernadotte’s outlying troops, posted by themselves at some distance

from the main army and scattered in detachments over a wide tract of

country for reasons of food-supply. Bernadotte only got news of the

enemy’s approach just in time; practically at the eleventh hour. He

was rapidly concentrating his corps at Möhringen, but barely half his

troops had been able to reach the point of danger when the Russians

struck their blow. He was able with the troops nearest at hand to avert

destruction, but the escape was a narrow one and his losses were very

heavy, all his baggage falling into the hands of the enemy. Fortunately

for the French the Russian advanced guard attacked prematurely and was

beaten back, after which Bernadotte made good his retreat to a safer

neighbourhood.

[Sidenote: FOUR TIMES TAKEN AND RETAKEN]

The 9th Light Infantry were in the forefront of the fighting, which

was at the closest quarters, the soldiers on both sides meeting man

to man. Four Eagle-bearers of the 9th fell, one after the other. Four

times the Eagle was taken by the Russians and recaptured at the point

of the bayonet. A fifth time the Eagle-bearer went down, and on his

fall this time the Eagle disappeared, while the 9th were driven back,

broken and in disorder. They were quickly rallied again, however, and

led once more to the charge, “going forward to the combat with the

fury of despair.” This time their impetuous onset forced the Russians

to give ground. Advancing with shouts of victory, they stormed the

village of Psarrefelden, immediately in front of them, and there

seized part of a Russian ammunition train. While searching for fresh

cartridges in one of the enemy’s ammunition wagons to replenish their

empty cartouche-boxes an officer, to his surprise, came upon the lost

Eagle. It had been broken from its staff in the last fight round it,

and its Russian captor, probably having enough to do to look after

himself without carrying it about, had apparently thrust it hastily

into the ammunition wagon on top of the cartridges. At any rate there

the Eagle of the 9th Light Infantry was found, and so it was regained.

The broken staff and flag were missing and were never seen again, but

the all-important Eagle had been recovered. It was hurriedly mounted on

a hop-pole, found leaning against a peasant’s hut near by, which was

improvised for a staff, and on that the Eagle was carried to the close

of the fighting that day, after which the 9th retreated with the rest

of Bernadotte’s corps.

Napoleon specially decorated the lieutenant who recovered the Eagle,

and who also had led more than one of the charges to rescue it in the

earlier fighting. He gave him the cross of the Legion of Honour with

a money grant. He further recorded the recovery of the Eagle--though

without mentioning how it was got back--in the 55th Bulletin of the

Grand Army, dated Warsaw, January 29, 1807:

“The Eagle of the 9th Light Infantry was taken by the enemy, but,

realising the deep disgrace with which their brave regiment would be

covered for ever, and from which neither victory nor the glory acquired

in a hundred combats could have removed the stigma, the soldiers,

animated with an inconceivable ardour, precipitated themselves on the

enemy and routed them and recovered their Eagle.”

So Napoleon wrote history.

[Sidenote: ON THE FIRST DAY AT EYLAU]

Two Eagles met their fate in the first day’s fighting at Eylau--in the

preliminary combat on February 7, which formed the opening phase of the

terrific encounter next day. At Eylau--a small township some twenty-two

miles to the south of Königsburg--Napoleon in person commanded with

80,000 men in the field, and met with his first serious check in a

European war. In following up the Russian rearguard on the afternoon of

the 7th, as it fell slowly back to rejoin its main body, drawn up in

position on the farther side of Eylau, on ground chosen beforehand by

the Russian leader for making a stand, two of Napoleon’s battalions,

while pressing hotly forward after the enemy over the open plain,

some two miles from Eylau, were overpowered and cut to pieces. They

had charged and were driving in the nearest Russians to them, when a

Russian cavalry regiment, the St. Petersburg Dragoons, unexpectedly

came on the scene. Sweeping round amidst the tumult of the fighting,

the dragoons rode into them on the flank. The two battalions were

slaughtered almost to a man within five minutes, before help could

get to them, and their Eagles were snatched up and borne away. It was

an act of expiation for the St. Petersburg Dragoons. On the previous

day Murat’s pursuing hussars had charged and broken them, putting

them to flight, and in a wild panic they had ridden over one of their

own regiments, trampling their comrades down, with loss of life. To

retrieve their character the St. Petersburg Dragoons now went savagely

at the two French battalions, riding them down with reckless daring and

relentless fury, giving no quarter. Their capture of two of Napoleon’s

Eagles in one charge, the taking of two Eagles by a single regiment,

stands on its own account as a unique achievement.

[Illustration: Sketch Plan of the Battlefield of EYLAU]

Eylau--the historic battle of February 8, 1807--was fought in the depth

of winter; in the midst of a flat expanse of a desolate snow-plain

and ice-bound marshes; under dreary lowering skies of leaden grey;

amid howling gusts of piercing wind, with driving snow-storms sweeping

intermittently across the field of battle. A hundred and fifty thousand

men on both sides faced each other at the break of day, after passing

the night with their outposts within shot of one another, the soldiers

all lying in an open bivouac on the snow, round their watch-fires,

wrapped up in their cloaks, the only shelter from the bitter cold. They

fronted each other in the grey dawn “within half-cannon shot, their

immense masses distributed in dense columns over a space in breadth

less than four miles. Between them lay the field of battle, a wide

stretch of unenclosed ground, rising on the Russian side to a range

of small hills. All over the plain, ponds and marshes intersected the

ground, but far and wide all was now covered over with ice and deep

snow.”

Napoleon began the battle with a fierce cannonade, opening a terrific

fire all along the line with no fewer than 350 guns. The Russians

replied at once, firing back even more furiously and with yet more

guns. For almost an hour nearly 800 cannon belched forth shot and shell

on either side; an artillery duel perhaps unparalleled in war. Then, in

the midst of the cannonade, Napoleon launched his first attack. Fifteen

thousand men of Augereau’s corps moved out from the centre of the

French line to storm the Russian position. They went forward, massed in

two immense columns, with, in support, a third column of one of Soult’s

divisions.

[Sidenote: GOING FORWARD TO THEIR DOOM]

They went forward to their doom: to meet disaster, swift, terrible,

overwhelming, and to leave two of their Eagles in the hands of the

enemy as mementos of their fate. Yet they were not given up; neither

of those Eagles was surrendered. They remained on the field amid the

dead; left behind because there was not a man living of their regiments

to defend them. They lay where they fell, surrounded by the soldiers

who had died in their defence; lying on the snow for the Cossacks to

pick up and carry away. They were the Eagles of the 14th and the 24th

of the Line.

The Russians turned their guns on Augereau’s corps directly it

commenced its advance; it was sheer massacre for the French, as the

fierce tornado of cannon-balls crashed into the thick of the densely

massed columns. Whole companies were swept away, mowed down, on every

side. “Within a quarter of an hour, half of the corps were struck

down.” The rest, though, with stolid endurance, held firmly on their

way. The soldiers went doggedly on; only halting for a moment now and

again to close up their shattered ranks. At that moment, as they were

nearing the Russian position, a furious snow-storm burst over the

battlefield, the snow blowing right in the faces of the French. “It

was impossible,” one of the survivors told, “to see anything at all in

front; we could at times barely see a foot before us.” All, in spite

of that, however, laboured bravely to get forward; without wavering,

and regardless of the merciless fire of the Russian guns, which never

ceased for one moment.

[Sidenote: OVERWHELMED IN A SNOWSTORM]

Then, as the snow-blinded soldiers struggled on, when the storm of

whirling snow was at its worst, all in an instant the catastrophe

happened. Without warning, coming from nowhere, as it seemed, an

enormous mass of Russian horse, dragoons and Cossacks, charged

suddenly, amid an infernal din of furious shouting, into them. “So

thick was the snow-storm, and so unexpected the onset, that the

assailants were only a few feet off, and the long lances of the

Cossacks almost touching the French infantry when they were first

discerned.” The Russians swept down on all sides of the two divisions;

charging them in front and flanks and rear at once, the dragoons

sabring them right and left, the Cossacks stabbing at them with their

long eighteen-foot lances.

“The combat was not of more than a few minutes’ duration; the corps,

charged at once by foot and horse with the utmost vigour, broke and

fled in the wildest disorder back into Eylau, closely pursued by the

Russian cavalry and Cossacks, who made such havoc, that the whole,

above 15,000 strong, were, with the exception of 1,500 men, taken or

destroyed; and Augereau himself, with his two generals of divisions,

Desjardins and Heudelet, was desperately wounded.”

Cut off in one part of the field and hemmed in, the 24th of the Line,

“one of the finest regiments in the Grand Army, and itself almost equal

to a brigade,” as a French officer speaks of it, was destroyed to a

man. It refused to turn its back to the enemy, and stood its ground to

face its fate. The 24th were slaughtered as they stood in their ranks.

Colonel Sémelé and a devoted band of soldiers fought round the Eagle to

the last, and fell dead beside it. A Cossack picked the Eagle up and

rode off with it.

The 14th had led the attack. It had lost heavily from the Russian

cannonade, but was still pressing on when the cavalry came charging

down. The regiments next following it, however, had suffered still more

heavily from the artillery fire. They were swept away \_en masse\_ by the

Cossack rush. Thus the 14th were cut off and left by themselves, barely

half a battalion of men in numbers, in the midst of the raging torrent

of Cossacks and dragoons. The survivors hastily threw themselves into

a square on and round a low elevation or hillock of snow. There, with

their Eagle in their midst, they stood at bay, refusing to retire

without direct orders from their marshal.

[Sidenote: ISOLATED AND SURROUNDED]

Marbot, in his memoirs, describes the fate of the 14th, to which he

was sent with a message from Napoleon. He was one of Augereau’s aides

de camp. It was just after the wounded marshal had been carried back

to the churchyard of the village of Eylau, the centre of the French

position, whence Napoleon, on horseback, among his personal suite,

had witnessed the disaster. All could see the 14th standing there,

isolated and surrounded; “we could see that the intrepid regiment,

surrounded by the enemy, was brandishing the Eagle in the air, to show

that it still held its ground and wanted help.” Napoleon, “touched by

the grand devotion of these brave men, resolved to try to save them.

He gave orders that an officer should be sent to tell them to try to

make their way back towards the army. Cavalry would charge out to help

them. It looked,” says Marbot, “almost impossible to get through the

thronging Cossacks; but Napoleon’s command had to be obeyed.”

“A brave captain of engineers named Froissart, who, though not an

aide de camp, was on Augereau’s staff, happened to be nearest him,

and was told to carry the order to the 14th. Froissart galloped off:

we lost sight of him in the midst of the Cossacks, and never saw him

again or heard what became of him. The marshal, seeing that the 14th

did not move, then sent an officer named David. He had the same fate

as Froissart; we never heard of him again. Probably both were killed

and stripped, and could not be recognised among the many corpses which

covered the ground. For the third time the marshal called, ‘The officer

for duty!’ It was my turn.”

Marbot had seen his two predecessors go off with their swords drawn, as

though they intended to defend themselves against attacks on the way.

He had remarked that, and now proposed another method for himself.

“To attempt defence was madness; it meant stopping to fight amidst a

multitude of enemies. I went otherwise to work. Leaving my sword in its

scabbard, I considered myself rather as a rider who is trying to win

a steeple-chase and goes as quickly as possible by the shortest line

towards the appointed goal without troubling about what is to right or

left of his path. My goal was the hillock on which stood the 14th, and

I resolved to get there without taking heed of the Cossacks. I tried to

put them out of my mind entirely. The plan answered to perfection.”

“Lisette [Marbot’s charger], flying rather than galloping, moving more

lightly than a swallow, darted over the intervening space, leaping the

heaps of dead men and horses, the ditches, the broken gun-carriages,

the half-extinguished bivouac fires. Thousands of Cossacks swarmed over

the plain. The first who caught sight of me behaved like sportsmen

who, while beating, start a hare and tell of its whereabouts to

each other with shouts of ‘Your side!’ None of the Cossacks tried

to stop me. Perhaps it was because of the amazing speed of my mare;

perhaps--probably--because there were so many of them swarming round

that each thought I could not escape from his comrades farther on. At

any rate I got through them all, and without scratch either to myself

or to my mare, and managed to reach where the 14th stood.

[Sidenote: “AT LAST I WAS IN THE SQUARE!”]

“I found them in square on top of their hillock, but the slope all

round was very slight, and the Russian cavalry had been able to attack

them with several charges. All, though, had been beaten off, and the

regiment stood surrounded by a circle of dead horses and dragoons. The

corpses indeed formed a kind of rampart round our men, and made by now

their position almost inaccessible to mounted men. So I found, for in

spite of the help of our men, I had much difficulty in getting across

this horrible entrenchment. At last, however, I was in the square.”

The major of the 14th was the senior officer left alive, and to him

Marbot gave Napoleon’s order. But it was absolutely impossible to carry

it out; there were too few men left to make the attempt possible. They

would be overpowered, said the major to Marbot, before they had gone

half a dozen steps. They were past hope now, unless the cavalry could

cut their way to them at once. Marbot must save himself and get back

at once. He must take their Eagle back with him and deliver it into

Napoleon’s own hands. “I see no means left of saving the regiment,”

were the major’s words. “Return to the Emperor, and bid him farewell

from the 14th of the Line. We have faithfully obeyed his orders in

defence of the Eagle. Bear him back his Eagle which he entrusted to us,

which now we have no hope of defending longer. It would add too much

to the bitterness of death for us to see it fall into the hands of the

enemy.” The major handed the Eagle to Marbot and then saluted it, amid

shouts of “Vive l’Empereur!” from the men round.

Marbot took the Eagle, and, as the only means of preserving it during

his ride back, tried to break it off from its stout pole so as to

conceal it under his cloak. He was in the act of leaning forward to

get a purchase in order to break the oaken staff, when he was suddenly

rendered powerless by the wind of a grape-shot. It was a marvellous

escape from death. The shot actually went through his hat, within a

quarter of an inch of his head. It deprived him, as he describes,

of all power and sensation, although he still remained fixed in his

saddle, his eyes witnessing the last scene, the fate of the 14th. The

square was finally rushed by a swarm of Russian grenadiers, as Marbot

says, who came charging up to the spot--“big men with mitre-shaped caps

bound in brass.

[Sidenote: FIGHTING TO THE LAST MAN]

“These men hurled themselves furiously on the feeble remains of the

14th. Our poor fellows had little strength left for resistance,

weakened as they were by hardships and privations. They had for days

been only existing on potatoes and melted snow, and on that morning

had not had time to prepare even that wretched meal. Yet they made

bravely what fight they could with their bayonets, and when, as too

soon happened, the square was broken, they tried to hold together in

groups, fighting back to back and keeping up the unequal fight to the

last man.”

Those nearest Marbot, so as not to be bayoneted from behind, stood

all round him with their backs to the mare, hemmed in by a ring of

Russians, some shooting down the hapless Frenchmen, others killing them

with the bayonet.

Marbot, recovering his senses, got at the last moment an unexpected

chance of escape. His mare, Lisette, he says, “of a notoriously savage

temper,” was pricked by a bayonet apparently, for she suddenly sprang

forward, lashing out and kicking and biting. She crashed through the

nearest Russians and galloped off with Marbot on her back towards

Eylau. He was mistaken by the Cossacks, he thought, for a Russian

officer, and rode on until suddenly Lisette collapsed beneath him,

and Marbot rolled off into the snow, where he lay insensible for some

hours. He lay there until a marauder on the field after the battle

tried to strip him of his gold-laced uniform. That roused him, and he

cried for help, which came; but the Eagle of the 14th had disappeared.

Two Eagles of St. Hilaire’s division of Soult’s corps were taken at

about the same time that the 14th met its fate. One was that of the

10th Light Infantry, ridden down while hastening forward to support

Augereau. The 10th missed its way in the snow-storm and, blundering

close under the Russian guns, was “decimated by grape.” Immediately

after that, while reeling under the shock, and trying to re-form its

ranks, the Russian dragoons dashed into it. They burst into its midst

at full gallop, “unseen until they were actually among us.” No help

was near, and in less than three minutes the luckless 10th Light

Infantry had ceased to exist. The second of Soult’s Eagles that was

lost at Eylau was that of a battalion of the 28th of the Line, which

also perished, victims to the sabres of the Russian horsemen. It was

a little later in the day, just after the 28th had made a successful

bayonet charge on the Russian infantry. They were in the midst of their

combat when the dragoons dashed into them, rode through them, and

scattered them, bearing off the Eagle, snatched from the hands of the

Eagle-bearer, who was cut down in the \_mêlée\_.

[Sidenote: “THE FIRST GRENADIER OF FRANCE”]

The Heart of the “First Grenadier of France” nearly went to St.

Petersburg at the same time, The 46th and 28th together formed General

Levasseur’s division in Soult’s corps, and both were overwhelmed at

the same time by the Russian dragoons. The more fortunate 46th saved

both their Eagle and the silver casket in which the heart of La

Tour d’Auvergne was kept enshrined. The casket was worn, strapped on

a velvet shield, on the chest of the senior grenadier sergeant of

the First Battalion, whose station was next the Eagle-bearer. It was

with the 46th, then known as the 46th Demi-Brigade, that the heroic

“Premier Grenadier de France” was serving as a captain when he met

his death in the year of Hohenlinden, while in the act of capturing

an Austrian standard. The 46th of the Line of the modern French Army

keeps up to-day the traditional practice, first ordered by Moreau, the

victor of Hohenlinden, of calling his name first of all at regimental

parades. It was revived some thirty years ago, after being in desuetude

since 1809. “Immediately the Colonel has saluted the flag,” describes

one of the officers of the regiment, “the Captain commanding the

colour-company steps forward and, facing the men, calls in a loud voice

‘La Tour d’Auvergne,’ on which the senior sergeant of the company

steps out two paces and replies, in a loud voice also, ‘Mort au Champ

d’Honneur!’--‘Dead on the Field of Honour!’”

The heart of La Tour d’Auvergne in its silver casket was ceremoniously

deposited by the regiment at the Invalides in 1904, eight years ago.

The 25th of the Line saved its Eagle, but lost on the field every

single one of its officers. A plainly built obelisk with the brief

inscription, “To the Memory of the Officers of the 25th,” was erected

by Napoleon to commemorate their fate at Eylau.

Two Eagles of Davout’s corps were lost at Eylau. One was that of the

18th--the sole loss of an Eagle in the battle, as it so happens, that

it suited Napoleon’s purpose to admit publicly. This is what he said of

it in his Eylau Bulletin--the 58th Bulletin of the Grand Army:

“The Eagle of one of the battalions of the 18th Regiment is missing. It

has probably fallen into the hands of the enemy, but no reproach can

attach to this regiment in the predicament in which it was placed. It

is a mere accident of war. The Emperor will give the 18th another Eagle

when it has taken a standard from the enemy.”

Comments on this, by the way, a British officer, Colonel Sir Robert

Wilson, who was attached to the Russian army as British military

commissioner:

“Admirable! the accidental loss of \_one\_ Eagle and only one! Colonel

Beckendorff, then, did not carry \_twelve\_ Eagles (and, moreover,

several colours from which the Eagles had been unscrewed) to

Petersburg, where they now are for the inspection of the world!”

Napoleon made no other open reference to the loss of Eagles at Eylau;

but, as he showed a little later, he felt what had happened. On the

other hand, outside France, many people disbelieved the Russian

official despatches. “The number of Eagles said to be taken,” wrote the

editor of a London newspaper, “is astounding, indeed incredible.”

[Sidenote: TWO MORE EAGLES LOST]

The 18th lost their Eagle in the fierce fighting on the extreme right

of the battlefield, where, after storming the village of Serpallen,

Morand’s division captured a Russian battery, bayoneting the gunners.

As they took the guns a Russian cavalry brigade came hastening to

the spot to the rescue. Taking the 18th on the flank, the Russians

rode them down, breaking the regiment up and scattering it. The Eagle

disappeared in the midst of the fight. The Eagle of the 51st of the

Line was the other that was lost in Davout’s corps. That was taken by

the Prussian division which fought at Eylau; the last remnant of the

Jena army still combating in the field. The Prussians, some 12,000 in

number, had made good their escape to the Polish frontier and reached

the battlefield of Eylau at the close of the fight, in time to strike

in and take vengeance for their countrymen. They were, however,

deprived in the end of their trophy. The captured Eagle of the 51st was

claimed from them by the Russian general after the battle, and sent

with the eleven others to St. Petersburg, where it now is.

Two others of Davout’s Eagles which came through at Eylau had narrow

escapes. They were those of the 17th and 30th of the Line. The 17th

was one of the regiments ridden down by Towazysky’s dragoons, the

troopers who carried off the Eagle of the 18th. In their charge the

dragoons broke up the 17th as well, and the Eagle was left with only a

few men near by to defend it. They were in the midst of the dragoons as

the Russians galloped through, slashing with their sabres at all within

reach. As the only means of saving the Eagle, Locqueneux, a \_fourrier\_,

or quartermaster-sergeant, “thrust the Eagle under the snow and stood

on it shouting for help. Colonel Mallet heard the cry and ran to the

rescue. With a few men who rallied to the spot he succeeded in getting

the Eagle away from among the \_débris\_ of the 17th.” At roll-call next

morning only one man in five answered to his name. Napoleon, on his

ride over the field, happening to pass by while the muster was being

held, the gallant \_fourrier\_ was brought before him and presented with

a lieutenant’s commission and an annuity of 2,000 francs. The Eagle of

the 30th of the Line, another of Morand’s regiments, was saved from

capture in like manner by the personal devotion of another \_fourrier\_,

Morin by name. All round him men were falling, and he himself had been

severely wounded, but the brave fellow had just strength enough to bury

the Eagle under the snow. He fainted from loss of blood as he did it.

Morin was found next morning just alive, outstretched over where the

precious Eagle lay concealed. He was able to make signs and indicate

that it was lying underneath the snow, and then he died.

[Sidenote: FOUR CUIRASSIER EAGLES TAKEN]

Four cavalry Eagles, those of cuirassier regiments, made up the tale of

twelve lost by Napoleon in the two days at Eylau. Platoff’s Cossacks

of the Don captured the four. They swooped down on Murat’s cavalry,

while out of hand and partially dispersed after breaking through the

Russian centre, at the close of Murat’s desperate charge at the head of

seventy squadrons to save the survivors of the massacre of Augereau’s

ill-fated battalions. Of one cuirassier regiment only 18 men managed to

regain their own lines, leaving 530 of their comrades on the field to

be stripped of their shining armour by the Cossacks.

The Eagle of the Old Guard led a charge at Eylau at the head of the

Grenadiers. The Guard came into action to beat back a daring Russian

counter-attack on the centre of Napoleon’s position, which immediately

followed the annihilation of Augereau’s corps. Napoleon himself gave

the order for the Guard to go forward. “The Emperor,” describes

Caulaincourt, who was on Napoleon’s staff, and near him throughout,

“standing erect in the stirrups, his glass at his eye, was the first to

realise that the black shadow steadily drawing near through the veil

of the snow-storm must be the columns of the Russian reserve.[16] He

immediately sent against them two battalions of the Grenadiers of the

Guard commanded by General Dorsenne.” It was just after Murat had been

ordered to make his charge.

Dorsenne--“Le Beau Dorsenne,” he was universally called; he had the

reputation of being the handsomest man in the whole of the Grand

Army--started off on the instant, rapidly deploying his men into lines

as he moved forward, and with the Eagle of the Grenadiers of the Guard

in advance of the centre of the front line. The Old Guard moved out

in stately order, marching with clockwork precision, muskets at the

support--held erect at the side and steadied and supported with one

arm held stiffly across. One of the officers who rode beside Dorsenne

suggested to the general as they were nearing the Russians to open

fire. “Non!” was the haughty answer. “Grenadiers l’arme à bras! La

Vieille Garde ne se bât qu’à la baïonette!” (“No! Arms at the support!

The Old Guard only fights at the point of the bayonet!”)

They reached the Russians, who, on their side, seemed for the moment

as if spellbound at the sight of them. The nearest Russians stopped

short. They stood stock-still, rooted in the ground as it were, gazing

at the sudden apparition of the solid wall of 2,000 veteran giants in

their huge towering bear-skins. The next instant the battalion guns

of the Guard, which accompanied the advance on either flank, opened

with a burst of fire at short range into the thick of the Russians. At

once, down came the gleaming rows of bayonets, and, like one man, the

Old Guard sprang forward and charged into the enemy. A moment before

the bayonets crossed a squadron of the Chasseurs of the Guard, the men

on duty as Napoleon’s own personal escort, sent forward by the Emperor

himself to assist the Grenadiers, dashed into the rear of the Russian

column, and “drove it forward on our Grenadiers, who received it with

fixed bayonets.”

[Sidenote: THE EAGLE OF THE OLD GUARD]

Just before that it was that the Eagle of the Old Guard had its

adventure. A shell dropped right in front of it and burst. The

fragments smashed the Eagle pole in two places, just above and below

the hands of the Eagle-bearer. The Eagle fell to the ground at the feet

of the Russians. But they had not time to get hold of it. Instantly

Lieutenant Morlay, the Eagle-bearer, sprang forward and recovered it.

Picking the Eagle up, with the flag and fragment of pole that was left,

Morlay snatched hold of a grenadier’s musket and jammed the piece of

the staff into the muzzle beside the bayonet. He carried the Eagle in

that manner throughout the rest of the battle.[17]

[Sidenote: AT MIDNIGHT AFTER THE BATTLE]

A hundred and fifty thousand combatants had faced one another at

daybreak. An hour before midnight, when the last shots were fired,

50,000 men lay dead or wounded on the field. “Never,” if we may recall

the grim picture of the scene next day that Alison has drawn, “was

spectacle so dreadful as that field presented on the following morning.

Above 50,000 men lay in the space of two leagues, weltering in blood.

The wounds were, for the most part, of the severest kind, from the

extraordinary quantity of cannon-balls which had been discharged

during the action and the close proximity of the contending masses to

the deadly batteries, which spread grape at half-musket shot through

their ranks. Though stretched on the cold snow and exposed to the

severity of an Arctic winter, the sufferers were burning with thirst,

and piteous cries were heard on all sides for water, or assistance

to extricate the wounded men from beneath the heaps of slain or load

of horses by which they were crushed. Six thousand of these noble

animals encumbered the field, or, maddened with pain, were shrieking

aloud amidst the stifled groans of the wounded. Broken gun-carriages,

dismounted cannon, fragments of blown-up caissons, scattered balls, lay

in wild confusion amidst casques, cuirassiers, and burning hamlets,

casting a livid light over a field of snow. Subdued by loss of blood,

tamed by cold, exhausted by hunger, the foemen lay side by side, amidst

the general wreck. The Cossack was to be seen beside the Italian; the

gay vine-dresser from the banks of the Garonne lay athwart the stern

peasant from the plains of the Ukraine.”

When Napoleon took his ride over the field, “the men exhibited none of

their wonted enthusiasm; no cries of ‘Vive l’Empereur!’ were heard; the

bloody surface echoed only with the cries of suffering or the groans of

woe.”

[Sidenote: THE “TEMPLE OF VICTORY”]

Sixteen Russian standards were sent to Paris after Eylau; Napoleon’s

set-off to the twelve Eagles taken to St. Petersburg. They were to be

hung, he directed, temporarily at the Invalides, until such time as

the conversion of the former Church of the Madeleine into Napoleon’s

grandiose “Temple of Victory” should be effected--a project that was

fated never to be accomplished. There, designed Napoleon, all the

trophies of the Grand Army would find their final resting-place,

in a splendid edifice, designed externally after the Parthenon at

Athens. Within, the trophies would be displayed, amidst colonnades

of Corinthian pillars of marble and granite and a mass of decorative

sculptures, statues of marshals and generals who had met their death

in battle, and bas-reliefs of famous colonels, before a lofty marble

curule chair, which Napoleon would occupy as a throne on great

occasions. “It is a Temple I desire,” he laid down, writing from his

camp in Poland, “not a church; and everything must be made in a chaste,

severe, and durable style, and be suitable for solemnities at all times

and all hours.”

Two more Eagles had yet to go to St. Petersburg before the war was

over--the Eagle of the 15th of the Line and another. They were the

spoils that the beaten Russian army carried off from the battle of

Friedland, fought some six months after Eylau, on July 14. Napoleon

won one of his most famous victories at Friedland, and one that he

afterwards recorded on the colours of all the regiments that fought in

the battle; but the defeated army carried back with them two more of

his Eagles.

The Eagle of the 15th of the Line, a regiment of Marshal Ney’s corps,

was lost in a bayonet charge while fighting the Russian Imperial Guard.

The second Eagle was left among the dead in the repulse of a column of

Marshal Lannes’ corps in the earlier part of the battle. “A column of

3,000 men advanced straight against Friedland. They were permitted to

approach close to the Russian cannon without a single shot being fired,

when suddenly the whole opened with grape, and with such effect that in

a few minutes a thousand men were struck down, the column routed, and

the Eagle taken.”

One of the regiments of the column saved itself as it fell back by

rallying round its Eagle. As at Eylau, so at Friedland the Russian

dragoons dashed down among the broken battalions while trying to

re-form under the murderous cannonade. The 50th of the Line had been

near the head of the column, and more than half of its men had been

shot down. The dragoons were cutting their way through to the Eagle,

when Adjutant Labourie snatched it from its wounded bearer, and,

holding it up, shouted to the men: “Rally round the Eagle. We must

defend it to the death!” A small square hastily formed round him, and,

stubbornly resisting, they kept the Russian dragoons off and fought

their way back to safety with the Eagle.

[Sidenote: GOLDEN WREATHS FOR THE EAGLES]

The Peace of Tilsit closed the war within a month of Friedland.

The welcome-home of Paris to the Old Guard, and public decoration

of the Eagles with crowns of gold, was the curtain-scene and grand

\_finale\_ of the Jena-Friedland drama. To all the regiments of the Grand

Army under fire at Jena, Friedland, and Eylau, wreaths of gold, to be

affixed round the necks of their Eagles, were voted by the Municipality

of Paris. The wreaths were to be publicly presented to each regiment on

its return to France.

The Guard were the first to receive theirs, and their arrival in the

capital was made the occasion of a series of civic fêtes; announced

officially as being “offered in tribute to the Glory of the Grand

Army.” Wednesday, November 25, 1807, was the day on which the Guard

were due to reach Paris. All had been made ready to accord them a

magnificent reception.

The Prefect of the Seine, at the head of the City magistrates and

the Municipal Councillors of Paris, all in their robes and chains

and glittering insignia of office, escorted by a mounted cohort of

National Guards, met the returning veterans at the Barrier on the

Strasburg road. Marshal Bessières led the Guard, who marched up with

bands playing and resplendent in their full-dress uniforms, horse

and foot and artillery--12,000 men in all. A gigantic triumphal arch

was set up beyond the Barrier, wide enough for twenty men to march

through abreast. It was the approach to a wide arena on which the

troops drew up, massed in front of a lofty platform, decked out with

flags and wreaths of evergreens and bright-coloured hangings. There the

Prefect took his place with his \_entourage\_ as the soldiers drew near.

Grand-stands to accommodate a crowd of sightseers surrounded the arena.

The Old Guard marched in and drew up in close order, on which the

proceedings opened with the civic address. “Heroes of Jena, of Eylau,

of Friedland,” began the Prefect, “conquerors of a splendid peace,

immortal thanks are your due from France! We salute you, Eagles of

war, the symbols of the might of our noble-hearted Emperor! You have

made known throughout the world, with his great name, the glory of

victorious France!” So, in grandiloquent style, the address commenced.

At its close the regiments of the Guards defiled past the platform in

turn--Carabineers and Cuirassiers, Chasseurs, Dragoons, and Hussars,

and the battalions of veteran Grenadiers. Round the neck of each Eagle,

as its corps came up, the Prefect hung a wreath of laurel-leaves in

gold.

Then came the triumphal march through the streets of Paris to the

Tuileries, amid cheering crowds, nearly beside themselves with

excitement and enthusiasm, and with difficulty kept back from breaking

through the rows of National Guards who lined the pavement, to hug the

grim bearskin-hatted warriors. The Eagles deposited with ceremony in

the Imperial Guardroom of the Palace of the Tuileries, the horsemen

dismounted in the Square of the Carrousel, muskets were piled, and all

marched off to the Champs Elysées. An immense banquet awaited them

there, under vast marquees--shelter that the men appreciated, for it

turned out a miserably wet afternoon.

[Sidenote: BANQUETED BY THE CITY OF PARIS]

The banquet in the Champs Elysées was the first in the round of

festivities with which Paris welcomed home the “Victors over Europe.”

The fêtes lasted over three days, and terminated in a grand reception

given by the Senate to all ranks of “Our Invincible Guard” in the

Gardens of the Luxembourg.[18]

CHAPTER VI

PREPARING FOR THE FUTURE

THE “EAGLE-GUARD”

The loss of twelve Eagles in one battle made a deep and lasting

impression upon Napoleon. That twelve of his cherished emblems, those

mementoes of victorious Caesar, for whose prestige he had advanced

such exacting claims, should have fallen \_en bloc\_ into the hands

of the enemy came as a galling blow to Napoleon’s military pride.

Twelve Eagles reft from amid the bayonets of the Grand Army on one

battlefield: twelve Eagles paraded together as trophies through the

capital of an exulting foe! It was a poignantly felt humiliation for

the mighty Imperator of the Field of Mars. And yet no default could be

charged against the soldiers to whom these Eagles had been entrusted.

All that men might do for their defence they had done. Most of the

luckless battalions, indeed, had fought and fallen directly under the

eyes of the Emperor himself, looking on from his post of vantage by the

wall of Eylau churchyard.

Napoleon, however, had already realised that his distribution of an

emblem to whose preservation he attached such extreme importance had

been made on too lavish a scale. He had been imprudent in distributing

such hostages to fortune broadcast; there were too many Eagles on

offer to the enemy. Napoleon, indeed, had already tacitly admitted

that. Within two months of the opening of the first campaign of the

Grand Army--during the Austerlitz campaign--immediately after Murat’s

daring gallop on Vienna, Napoleon had summarily directed all the

light cavalry Eagles to be sent back from the front. Every Hussar and

Chasseur regiment was ordered to return its three squadron Eagles to

head-quarters forthwith, for sending back to France. In future, a new

Army regulation laid down, those corps would not take their Eagles into

the field at all. The regulation after that was extended to Dragoons;

and later to all Light Infantry battalions. No doubt it was a step

dictated by prudence. In these corps particularly, from the nature of

the duties they had normally to perform, the Eagles were peculiarly

exposed to risk of isolation and capture.

What had happened at Eylau, and several narrow escapes in hand-to-hand

combats at Friedland, together with certain other incidents in that

battle which had come under Napoleon’s personal notice, where, through

a nervous anxiety for the safety of their Eagles, some battalion

commanders had kept back round them men whose bayonets were badly

wanted elsewhere, led to a further step. Napoleon took advantage of

the general scheme for the reorganisation of the Grand Army, which he

carried out in 1808, to recast entirely his original arrangement as to

the Eagles. He reduced the numbers by two-thirds.

[Sidenote: NO MORE BATTALION EAGLES]

Battalion Eagles were to be withdrawn in favour of Regimental Eagles.

In the infantry, under the reorganisation scheme, there were to be five

battalions to each regiment instead of three as heretofore; but there

would be only one Eagle in future for the entire regiment. The existing

Second and Third battalions were ordered to give up the Eagles they had

hitherto carried, which would find a resting-place at the Invalides.

The Regimental Eagle would be borne by the First Battalion. The other

battalions would carry only “fanions,” small pennon-shaped flags. Each

would have one “fanion,” a plain serge flag, of a distinctive colour

for each battalion, without any mark or device on it, beyond the number

of the battalion.

The Imperial edict, issued early in 1808, laid down that for the

special protection of the Regimental Eagle in battle a commissioned

officer and two picked veterans were to be appointed as the

“Eagle-Guard,” replacing the sergeant-major and escort of the

Battalion Eagles. The three were to be known as the First, Second,

and Third Eagle-Bearers or “Porte-Aigles.” The officer to whose

special charge the Regimental Eagle itself was committed was to be a

senior lieutenant, “a man of proved valour, with not less than ten

years’ Army service, including service on the battlefield in four

campaigns,” specified as those of Ulm, Austerlitz, Jena, and Friedland.

He would receive captain’s pay, and wear a gold-laced cocked hat and

gold epaulettes. The two other Porte-Aigles were to be, in Napoleon’s

own words, “deux braves,” of ten years’ service in the ranks, and

“non-lettrés.” On the last qualification, indeed, Napoleon laid

peculiar stress. The two were to be, as the Emperor himself put it,

“men who could neither read nor write, so that their only hope of

promotion should be through acts of special courage and devotion.” They

would receive lieutenants’ pay, have special privileges, and wear four

gold lace chevrons on their arms. Only the Emperor could nominate or

degrade Porte-Aigles.

[Sidenote: PENNONS TO FRIGHTEN HORSES]

The Second and Third Porte-Aigles were to carry no weapons except heavy

pistols, “to blow out the brains of an enemy attempting to lay hands

on an Eagle.” These were Napoleon’s own words as to that, in his order

of February 18, 1808: “Pour éviter que l’ardeur dans la mêlée ne les

détourne de leur unique objet, de la garde de l’Aigle, le sabre et

l’épée leurs sont interdits. Ils n’auront d’autres armes que plusieurs

paires de pistolets, d’emploi que de veiller froidement a brûler la

cervelle de celui qui avancerait la main pour saisir l’Aigle.” After

the Wagram campaign of 1809 Napoleon substituted a helmet and defensive

brass scale-epaulettes as the First Porte-Aigle’s equipment. He gave

the two soldiers of the Eagle-Guard a halberd each, with a pennon

or banderol attached--Red for the Second Porte-Aigle, White for the

Third--as well as a sword and a pair of large-bore pistols. The pennons

were for use should mounted men attack the Eagle; “for fluttering in

front of the horses in order to make them rear and plunge and upset

their riders.”[19]

Two more soldiers were added to the Eagle-Guard in 1813, as the Fourth

and Fifth Porte-Aigles. They were armed with the same weapons as

the others, and had respectively Yellow and Green pennons on their

halberds.

Yet further to add to the prestige of the Eagles, Napoleon, after

Wagram, decreed the institution of a Special Order of Military Merit,

which he called the “Order of the Trois Toisons d’Or”--something on the

lines of our own Victoria Cross--certain of the provisions of which

had direct reference to the Eagles. The decoration was to be conferred

on men, whatever their rank, “distinguished in the defence of the

Eagle of their regiment.” Also, according to the 6th Article of the

Constitution of the Order, “Les Aigles des régiments qui ont assisté

avec distinction aux grandes batailles seront décorés de l’Ordre des

Trois Toisons d’Or.”[20]

The special distinction of having the badge of the Legion of Honour

affixed to its Eagle as a decoration to the regimental standard was in

1812 granted to one corps, the celebrated 57th. It was as a reward

for magnificent intrepidity displayed under the eyes of Napoleon

at the battle of Borodino. The 57th had at the same time a further

and unique mark of Imperial regard awarded to it. Napoleon ordered

that a representation of the badge of the Legion of Honour should be

stamped on the uniform buttons of the regiment. No corps of the Grand

Army, perhaps, had a finer fighting tradition than this splendid

regiment--the same “\_Terrible 57me qui rien n’arrête\_,” of the Army of

Italy; which, too, as has been said, Napoleon singled out for a special

word of encouragement on the morning of Austerlitz; calling to them

as he rode past, “You will remember to-day, Fifty-seventh, how I once

named you ‘Le Terrible’!”

But, with regard to the Regimental Eagles of 1808, even for Napoleon it

was one thing to decree the abolition of Battalion Eagles, and another

to obtain compliance with the order that the surplus Eagles should be

returned to the War Minister for laying up at the Invalides.

[Sidenote: SOME CORPS DID NOT OBEY]

A number of second and third battalions of regiments stationed at

places out of the way of direct Imperial inspection--in garrisons

beyond the frontiers, in subjugated countries, or in the remaining

overseas possessions of France--continued for some time to evade the

order recalling their Eagles. No doubt, too, they were unwilling to

part with standards some of which had led the corps under fire at

Austerlitz and Jena.

Napoleon had to repeat his order of recall twice: once during 1809; the

second time in 1811. That second order was the outcome of a discovery

made by the Emperor himself. At an Imperial review of the troops of the

Amsterdam and North Holland garrisons on October 12, 1810, three of the

regiments had the temerity to parade before the Emperor’s eyes with

four Eagles apiece--one to each battalion. Such flagrant disobedience

could not be overlooked; and then subsequent inquiries brought out

the fact that elsewhere there were many Battalion Eagles which had

similarly been retained against orders. An additional discovery was

made at the same time, that the Fourth-Battalion Eagles had been

supplied surreptitiously, through some official at the Ministry of War,

entirely without Napoleon’s knowledge.

It made Napoleon excessively angry. He complained bitterly to Marshal

Berthier at the way in which the department which had to do with the

standards of the Army had been mismanaged. “La partie des drapeaux des

régiments,” he declared, “est aujourd’hui dans un grand chaos.” To

the Minister of War, General Clarke, Duc de Feltre, Napoleon sent a

stinging letter of rebuke.

With the letter went the draft of yet another decree, to be

communicated to every corps in the service.

[Sidenote: NAPOLEON’S FINAL ORDER]

“I only give,” wrote Napoleon now, “one Eagle per regiment

of infantry, one per regiment of cavalry, one per regiment of

artillery, one per regiment of special gendarmerie. None to the

departmental companies or guards of honour.

“No corps may possess an Eagle which has not been bestowed by my

own hand.

“All regiments, further, of whatever denomination, if they did not

receive the Eagle they are authorised to possess from the hand of

the Emperor in person, either directly on parade, or through a

regimental deputation, must return it to the Ministry of War for

the will of his Majesty to be declared as to that Eagle.

“All other corps are to carry ‘fanions,’ ordinary flags. Infantry

regiments reduced below 1,000 men in strength, and cavalry

regiments of less than 500 men, cannot retain their Eagle, and must

return it to the dépôt. They will be accorded a standard [drapeau]

without the Eagle.

“All the infantry regiments now in possession of an Eagle per

battalion, and cavalry with one per squadron, are to send the

extra-regulation Eagles at once to Paris, to be kept [\_déposées\_]

at the Invalides until they can be placed in the ‘Temple of Glory’

[the Church of the Madeleine, then being rebuilt].” “Jusqu’à ce

qu’elles puissent être misées dans le Temple de la Gloire,” was

what Napoleon wrote.

Three of the British trophy-Eagles now at Chelsea, it may be remarked

in passing, bear the number “82.” They came into our hands in February

1809, at the surrender of Martinique to a conjoint British military

and naval expedition. The 82nd was one of the regiments referred to as

out of the way of direct inspection; in garrison across the Atlantic.

It had not obeyed the order of 1808 to return its Second and Third

Battalion Eagles to Paris--with the result that three Eagles at Chelsea

represent the misfortune of this one regiment.

“The First Battalion,” ordered Napoleon in his decree of 1811, “is to

carry the Eagle: the other battalions will have each a fanion, quite

plain, as follows: 2nd Battalion, White; 3rd, Red; 4th, Blue. Where

certain regiments may possess additional battalions, these are to have,

the 5th a Green fanion, the 6th a Yellow fanion.”[21]

In 1813, in Napoleon’s conscript army levied to replace the

host destroyed in Russia, the newly raised Line regiments, and

“Provisional-Regiments,” made up of the amalgamated dépôt battalions of

various corps, had to earn their Eagles on the battlefield. “No newly

raised regiment,” ordered Napoleon, “is to receive an Eagle until after

his Majesty has been satisfied with its service before the enemy.”

[Sidenote: THE ONLY NAMES ALLOWED]

The flags issued in 1808, and after that, to go with the Regimental

Eagles, were much more elaborate than those of the Champ de Mars. They

had white diamond-shaped centre panels, similar to those in the flags

presented on the Field of Mars, but with Imperial crowns embroidered in

gold on the red and blue upper corners of the flag, and golden Eagles

on the lower corners. Gold embroidered wreaths of laurel, encircling

the Imperial monogram “N.” divided off the crowns above from the Eagles

below. A border of gold fringe round the entire flag, embroidered

with bees, was another new enrichment. In these flags the regimental

battle-honour inscriptions on the reverse side of the white centre

space in the former flags appeared in a revised from. Only victories of

importance since the institution of the Empire, and at which Napoleon

had commanded in person, were admitted. Ulm, Austerlitz, Jena, Eylau,

Friedland, Eckmühl, Essling, Wagram, constituted the full list from

which selection was made. One regiment alone was allowed to record an

earlier victory:--the Imperial Guard. They preserved their “Marengo”

honour. Inscriptions such as “Le 75e arrive et bât l’ennemi,” “J’étais

tranquille, le 32e était là,” and the others which had been allowed on

the flags of the Field of Mars, recalling deeds of the Army of Italy,

disappeared from the revised pattern of 1808. A new inscription was

specially authorised for the flag of one regiment, in honour of a feat

of great distinction during the Wagram campaign. The 84th of the Line

was permitted to inscribe “Un contre dix--Grätz, 1809”--but that only

lasted for three years; the inscription was ordered to be taken off in

1811.

The design of the flag introduced in 1808 held until 1814. A less

elaborate design was adopted for the Eagle-standards of the “Hundred

Days,” two specimens of which are in this country--the Waterloo

trophies at Chelsea.

Attractive and handsome as the new flag was, the Army, as before,

looked on it as but an appendage, as merely “l’ornement de l’Aigle.”

The Eagle at the head of the staff, by itself, was all that nine

soldiers out of ten troubled about. Not a few regiments, indeed, when

on service, removed the flags altogether from their Eagle-poles and

displayed as their standard the Eagle only. Particularly was this the

case in Spain, where many regiments were in the field continuously,

in some instances, for over six years--from 1808 to 1814. Asked one

day after the Peninsular War about the inscription and battle-honours

on the flag of his regiment, an infantry \_chef de bataillon\_ frankly

confessed that he had “never set eyes on it!” The silken flag, he

explained, “had been removed from the Eagle-pole before he first

joined as a lieutenant, and had always, as he understood, been kept

at the dépôt of the corps in France, rolled up and locked away in the

regimental chest. The Eagle on its bare pole was all he had ever seen.”

Said another officer: “We never spoke of the regiment’s ‘colours,’ and

never saw them. We spoke only of ‘the Eagle.’”

[Sidenote: WHEN NAPOLEON MET AN EAGLE]

This may be added. Napoleon was scrupulously exact in showing respect

to the Eagle of a regiment whenever he passed one; whether on the line

of march, or in bivouac, under a sentry, with the Eagle-Guard near at

hand, resting horizontally on a support of piled muskets with bayonets

fixed. If on horseback, Napoleon always uncovered and bowed low; if on

the line of march, he sometimes stopped his carriage in passing, and

got out, saluted the Eagle, and said a few words about the regiment’s

battle record to the Eagle-Guard.

Between the review on the Field of Mars in 1804 and the overthrow on

the plains of Leipsic in 1814 the number of regiments in the Grand Army

increased continuously, requiring the presentation of many new Eagles.

Forty-four were presented in the period to the infantry alone; to the

regiments of the Line bearing numbers from the 113th to 156th; besides

others to the regiments of the “Middle Guard” and “Young Guard,” and

to two additional regiments of Cuirassiers. In every case Napoleon,

in accordance with the stipulation that he so insisted on, made the

presentation in person, with his own hand.

In not a few instances, indeed, the ceremony took place on campaign;

and for one of these exceptionally interesting occasions we have

available the notes of an eye-witness. It was at the presentation of

the Eagle of the 126th Regiment of the Line, in Germany, in 1813.

Napoleon made his appearance in his campaigning uniform, the dark

green undress of the Chasseurs of the Guard, and mounted as usual on

a grey charger. His staff, all brilliant in full dress, attended him.

Approaching the scene at a canter, they all slowed down to a walk as

they neared where the regiment stood, with its battalions parading

every available man, and drawn up to form three sides of a hollow

square. The new Eagle, enveloped in the leather casing in which it had

been brought from France, lay on a pile of drums on one flank of the

First Battalion, and a little in advance. The fourth, or open, side of

the square was for the Imperial staff, who drew up there, while the

Emperor by himself rode into the middle of the square. As Napoleon

reined up, the regimental drums beat the \_Appel\_, and the officers of

the regiment stepped to the front, with swords at the carry, and formed

in line before the Emperor.

Marshal Berthier, Chief of the Head-quarter Staff, then rode across to

where the Eagle lay. He dismounted to receive it at the hands of the

First Porte-Aigle, the Eagle being uncased at the same time. Berthier

saluted the Eagle; then, holding it erect with both hands, the

marshal bore it ceremoniously along in front of the row of officers,

who saluted with lowered swords as the Eagle passed, the drums of the

regiment now beating a long roll. Halting close in front of Napoleon,

Berthier inclined the Eagle forward in salute, and the Emperor, on his

side, uncovered and bowed in return. Then, drawing his glove from his

left hand, Napoleon raised his hand and extended it towards the Eagle.

He held the reins, according to his custom, in his right hand. Napoleon

began his address to the corps in a deep, impressive tone:

[Sidenote: AT A PRESENTATION IN THE FIELD]

“Soldiers of the 126th Regiment 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 honour of France! You swear ever to prefer death

for it to dishonour! You swear!” The last words were pronounced with a

peculiar stress, in a very solemn tone, with intense energy.

Instantly the officers of the regiment replied. Holding their swords on

high, with one voice they shouted: “We swear!”

The next moment the words were taken up and repeated enthusiastically

by the men: “We swear!”

Berthier, on that, formally handed the Eagle over to the colonel of the

regiment, and the Emperor, raising his hand to his hat in salute to

the Eagle, turned to rejoin the Staff and ride off elsewhere.

On the afternoon before the three days’ battle of Leipsic opened, on

October 15, 1813, Napoleon, on the Marchfeldt, in the very presence of

the enemy, presented with these formalities new Eagles to three newly

raised regiments.

CHAPTER VII

BEFORE THE ENEMY AT ASPERN AND WAGRAM

Napoleon’s regimental Eagles made their début on the battlefield in the

Wagram campaign of 1809, when Austria challenged Napoleon to a second

trial of strength in her premature attempt to achieve the liberation

of Germany. The gallant deeds of the regiments that fought round the

Eagles in that war are commemorated on the standards of the French

Army to-day by the legend “Wagram, 1809,” a name and date that stand

as the comprehensive memento of a conflict that lasted four months,

and included no fewer than ten fiercely fought battles. They are

superabundant as a fact; it would almost need a book by itself to tell

the full story. It must suffice therefore to take here only these,

picked out at random, as typical of the rest.

This is the achievement that “Wagram, 1809,” inscribed in golden

letters on the silken tricolor standard of the present-day 65th of the

Line, serves to recall.

Napoleon’s 65th was one of the regiments of Marshal Davout’s corps

at Ratisbon, where Davout had been stationed on the eve of the

outbreak of the war. He was hastily recalled on the Austrians opening

hostilities and advancing in greatly superior force. Davout fell back

at once, leaving behind him the 65th to hold the very important bridge

over the Danube at Ratisbon for forty-eight hours, until the bulk of

his corps had gained a sufficient start on their way.

The 65th had not long to wait for the enemy. Within twelve hours of

the marshal’s retirement the Austrians swooped down on Ratisbon to

seize the bridge. Two of their army corps led the advance. One took

possession of the city, sending troops forward to secure the bridge.

Part of the other crossed the Danube in the neighbourhood of the city

in boats, in order to cut off and capture the French troops left

behind. It was expected that in the presence of so overpowering an

enemy the single French regiment holding the bridge would not venture

to make a serious defence. The Austrians did not know the 65th.

To oppose the first comers three battalions of the 65th barricaded and

loopholed the houses nearest the bridge on that side. The remaining

battalion held a fortified outwork, or bridge-head, across the river.

For a whole day the battalions in the city held the Austrians at bay,

resisting desperately in the streets and from house to house. Four

hundred Austrian prisoners, together with an Austrian regimental

standard and three other flags, testified to the way they did their

duty. The battalion holding the bridge-head on the farther side of the

river made meanwhile a no less stubborn resistance and kept the enemy

off until nightfall. Then, however, it was found that their ammunition

was exhausted. The three battalions fighting the city were by that

time in a no less desperate plight. They on their side had been forced

back to their last defences among the houses immediately surrounding

the approach to the bridge. Still, though, they kept up a fierce

resistance, at the last using cartridges taken from the cartouche-boxes

of the Austrian prisoners and their own dead and wounded comrades. They

held out until further defence of the bridge was impossible, until

indeed further resistance at all was hopeless.

[Sidenote: HOW WERE THEY TO SAVE THE EAGLE?]

But the regimental Eagle? What was to become of that? The Eagle of the

65th must at all cost be kept from being surrendered into an enemy’s

hands. What was to be done? At first it was suggested that an officer,

known to be a good swimmer, should try to swim down the river with

it in the dark until he could land safely on the farther bank, after

which he should do his best to make his way to wherever Napoleon might

be, there to render personally into his hands the sacred Eagle. But

the other surviving officers were loth to part with their treasured

standard in that way. The risk of a man getting through the Austrians

who were swarming on the other side of the Danube was considered too

great. It was then suggested to sink it in the Danube, noting the

spot, so as to be able to fish it up again on some future day. Colonel

Coutard, in command of the 65th, however, was against that. They might

never be able, or have time, to find it at the bottom of a deep and

swiftly flowing river like the Danube. He proposed to conceal the Eagle

in the ground, burying it in some secret place. There it might without

difficulty be recovered later on and brought back to France. The

colonel’s proposal was assented to, and then a further suggestion was

made. Their Eagle should be given a fitting shroud by wrapping round

it the captured Austrian flags they had taken that afternoon. That

would preserve the trophies also for future days when the fortune of

war again favoured the regiment. The idea was eagerly taken up, and the

Eagle was buried in a cellar, wrapped up in the Austrian flags.

[Sidenote: WRAPPED UP IN CAPTURED FLAGS]

After that, at the very last, just as the Austrians were about to

launch another attack it was impossible to withstand, Colonel Coutard

had the \_chamade\_ beaten, and the 65th surrendered. They were granted,

as they well deserved, the honours of war, and were for the time being

confined under guard in the city. Their captivity, however, was not

for long. Their release came about in a very few days on the Austrian

troops hurriedly evacuating Ratisbon before Napoleon’s triumphant

advance.[22] The Eagle was now dug up, and Colonel Coutard, with a

deputation from the regiment, waited on Napoleon on his arrival, to

present the Eagle before him, still wrapped up in the three captured

Austrian flags.

In recognition of the endurance that the 65th had shown, the colonel

was created a Baron of the Empire; crosses of the Legion of Honour were

distributed broadcast among all ranks; forty soldiers who had shown

exceptional gallantry in the fighting were, as a reward, specially

transferred to the Old Guard.

Such is the fine story that the battle-honour “Wagram, 1809,” lettered

in gold on the regimental tricolor of the present-day 65th of the Line

in the French Army commemorates, and care is taken that every young

soldier on joining is made acquainted with it.

Equally fine as an exploit, and yet more renowned for the exceptional

honour that Napoleon paid to the Eagle of the regiment, was the

splendid heroism that the 84th of the Line displayed at Grätz in

Styria. That episode of the campaign, indeed, is commemorated by a

double battle-honour on the flag of the 84th of the modern French Army.

Both “Wagram, 1809,” and “Un contre dix--Grätz, 1809” are inscribed in

golden letters on its tricolor. Napoleon himself, as has been said,

bestowed the honour of the unique inscription on the regimental flag.

He had also the words “Un contre dix” incised on the square tablet

supporting the Eagle itself. Here is the story of the exploit as

related by one of Napoleon’s staff officers in the campaign, Colonel

Lejeune:

[Sidenote: KEPT OFF WITH THE BAYONET]

“Amongst all these battles and victories there was one action so

remarkable and so brilliant that I feel impelled to describe it here

from the accounts of eye-witnesses. During the taking of Grätz by

General Broussier, and when the struggle was at its fiercest, Colonel

Gambin of the 84th Regiment was ordered, with two of his battalions,

to attack the suburb of St. Leonard, where he made from four to five

hundred prisoners. This vigorous assault led General Guilay on the

enemy’s side to imagine he had to deal with a whole army, and he

hurried to the aid of the suburb with considerable forces. Gambin did

not hesitate to attack them, and he took from them the cemetery of the

Graben suburb, but was in his turn invested by the Austrian battalions,

and found it impossible to rejoin the main body of the French. He

accepted the situation, spent the whole of the night in fortifying

the cemetery and the adjoining houses, and, his ammunition being

exhausted, he actually kept at bay some 10,000 assailants with the

bayonet alone, even making several sorties to carry off the cartouches

on the dead bodies with which his attacks had strewn the ground near

the cemetery. General Guilay now directed the fire of all his guns and

five fresh battalions on this handful of brave men, who had already

for nineteen hours withstood a whole army. General Broussier was at

last able to send Colonel Nagle of the 92nd, with two battalions, to

the aid of the 84th. The enemy vainly endeavoured to prevent the two

regiments from meeting. Colonel Nagle overthrew every obstacle, got

into the cemetery, and after embracing each other the two officers,

with their united forces, flung themselves upon the Austrians, took 500

of them prisoners, with two flags, and carried the suburb of Graben by

assault, finding no less than 1,200 Austrian corpses in the streets.

When the Emperor heard of this feat of arms, he was anxious to confer

the greatest distinction he could on the 84th Regiment, and ordered

that its banner should henceforth bear in letters of gold the proud

inscription, ‘One against ten.’”

Seldom indeed did the soldiers of Napoleon encounter a more determined

enemy than the Austrians proved themselves in the war of 1809.

At Aspern, the battle on the Danube near Vienna, where Napoleon

experienced his first defeat on the Continent, more than one Eagle

came within an ace of being taken. The Eagle of the 9th of the Line,

for instance, to save it from what appeared to be imminent capture,

was actually buried on the battlefield in the middle of the fighting.

“Our colonel,” wrote one of the men of the 9th, “took the Eagle of the

regiment, pulled it from its staff, and, after digging a hole in the

ground with a pioneer’s tool, buried and concealed there our rallying

signal to prevent it from falling into the enemy’s hands.” It was,

though, after all, an unnecessary precaution. The hard-pressed 9th were

rescued at the last moment, whereupon the Eagle made its reappearance.

[Sidenote: VICTIMS OF A PANIC IN THE DARK]

Three other Eagles, less fortunate, are now in the Austrian Army Museum

at Vienna; those of the 35th of the Line and of the 95th and 106th. The

Eagle of the 35th was taken on the Italian frontier near Lake Garda,

in a surprise attack at daybreak on the camp of the Viceroy, Eugène

Beauharnais, by the troops of the Archduke John. The other two fell

into Austrian hands on the night of the opening attack at Wagram,

victims of a panic that suddenly seized one of the French columns.

It had led the attack on the centre of the Austrian position with

brilliant success.

Two thousand prisoners and five standards had been taken, and the

French were advancing exultantly, when the Austrians counter-attacked

with fresh troops, headed by the Archduke Charles in person. The

French resisted stubbornly, and at first successfully. They held their

own until, in the midst of furious hand-to-hand fighting, they were

suddenly charged by cavalry. It was late evening, and in the gathering

dusk a sudden panic seized a regiment on the flank. The panic spread

instantly to the whole of the attacking column. All order was lost

forthwith. The soldiers gave way in confusion, broke up, and went

racing back headlong, a mob of fugitives, down the steep ascent that a

few minutes before they had so gallantly won. As they went back in a

tumultuous rush, fresh French troops, coming up to their support, “in

the darkness mistook the retreating host for enemies and fired upon it;

they, in their turn, were overthrown by the torrent of fugitives.” The

Austrian prisoners taken in the advance escaped, the captured Austrian

standards were recaptured, and two Eagles disappeared in the dark amid

the turmoil. Those are the two now at Vienna.

Fortunately for Napoleon the Austrian leaders did not realise the

smashing nature of the blow they had dealt. The fate of Napoleon’s

Empire otherwise might have been decided on that night. Unaware that

the panic had “spread an indescribable alarm through the French centre

as far as the tent of the Emperor, they stopped the advance, sounded

the recall, and fell back to their original positions.”

Of the Eagle-bearers of four regiments at Aspern, the 2nd, 16th,

37th, and 67th of the Line, not one came through the day alive, but

the Eagles were saved. They were the four regiments that took the

village of Aspern and held it all day and till after dark--12,000

men against 80,000 enemies. The village was the all-important key of

the battlefield. Its defence was of supreme moment, for only part of

Napoleon’s army had been able to get across the Danube as yet, the main

bridge of boats having been broken down and swept away.

They had seized Aspern at the outset, but had been forced to fall back

before an Austrian counter-attack, returning after that to recapture

it, and hold it until the end.

Marshal Masséna led the onset that retook the village. “The Austrians,”

describes a French officer, “had entered Aspern, and it was absolutely

necessary to dislodge them. Masséna therefore, who had had all his

horses killed, marched on foot with drawn sword at the head of the

Grenadiers of the Molitor division, forced his way into the village,

crowded as it was with Austrians, drove them out, and pursued them

for some twelve or fourteen yards beyond the houses. But here the

French troops found themselves face to face with the strong force

under Hiller, Bellegarde, and Hohenzollern, advancing rapidly in their

direction. It was hopeless for the division to attempt to engage such

superior numbers in the open plain, so Masséna recalled the pursuers,

and ordered them to hold Aspern. The enemy, ashamed apparently of this

first defeat, returned to the charge with 80,000 men and more than a

hundred pieces of cannon, which were soon pointed on the village.”

[Sidenote: AT BAY IN THE BURNING VILLAGE]

It was impossible to stop the onrush of the Austrians. In spite of

every effort of Masséna, who with his artillery “opened fire upon

the densely packed masses of men, every shot working terrible havoc

amongst them,” they swarmed forward to the outskirts of the village.

A life-and-death struggle in defence began. “In a very few minutes

the village was completely surrounded by troops; and hidden from view

in the dense clouds of smoke from the cannon, the musketry, and the

fires which at once broke out, the combatants, almost suffocated by

the smoke, crossed bayonets without being able to see each other; but

neither side gave way a step, and for more than an hour the terrible

attack and desperate defence went on amongst the ruins of the burning

houses.”

It was during the Austrian opening attack on the outskirts of Aspern

that at one point a French regiment--the number of the regiment is not

given in any account--was forced apart from the rest, and driven back

in disorder beyond the village. Its colonel was killed, and, though

the Eagle was kept from falling into the enemy’s hands, the regiment

fell back in confusion. Napoleon witnessed the check and galloped to

intercept the troops as they were retreating. Riding into the midst

of the fugitives, he personally rallied them, and then called angrily

for the colonel. There was no answer from any one, and in high anger

Napoleon again called for the colonel. Then somebody made the reply

that the colonel was dead. “I know that!” answered Napoleon sharply. “I

asked where he was!” “We left him in the village.” “What! you left your

colonel’s body in the hands of the enemy? Go back instantly, find it,

and remember that a good regiment should always be able to produce both

its Colonel and its Eagle!” Napoleon’s stinging rebuke did its work.

The men at once re-formed and turned back. Charging forward with a

rush, they forced their way through to where the colonel had fallen and

recovered the body. Then they joined in with the other defenders at the

village, and did their duty to the end. The colonel’s body was brought

back and laid before Napoleon next morning.

[Sidenote: MARSHAL MASSENA UNDER FIRE]

The fearful contest in Aspern went on until four in the afternoon, by

which time the Austrians had succeeded in taking half the village. They

could not, however, get beyond that. “Masséna still held the church and

cemetery, and was struggling to regain what he had lost. Five times

in less than three hours he took and retook the cemetery, the church,

and the village, without being able to call to his aid the Legrand

division, which he was obliged to hold in reserve to cover Aspern on

the right and keep the enemy from getting in on that side. Throughout

this awful struggle Masséna stood beneath the great elms on the green

opposite the church, calmly indifferent to the fall of the branches

brought down upon his head by the showers of grape-shot and bullets,

keenly alive to all that was going on, his look and voice, stern as the

\_quos ego\_ of Virgil’s angry Neptune, inspiring all who surrounded him

with irresistible strength.”

Even when the sun went down “the struggle was far from being over,

and the awful battle was still raging in the streets and behind the

walls of the village of Aspern. The enemy, irritated at the stubborn

resistance of so small a body of troops, redoubled their efforts to

dislodge them before nightfall, and went on fighting by the light of

the conflagrations alone. The history of our wars relates no more

thrilling incident than this long and obstinate struggle, in which

our troops, disheartened by the ever-fresh difficulties with which

they had to contend, worn out by fatigue, and horrified by the carnage

round them, were kept at their posts by the example and exhortations of

Masséna and his officers alone. General Molitor had lost some half of

his men, and the enemy were hurrying up from every side. The struggle

was maintained under these terrible conditions until eleven o’clock,

when we remained masters of Aspern and of the whole line between it and

Essling.”

Five regiments of the French Army of to-day commemorate a splendid

Eagle-incident in the name “Wagram, 1809,” on their colours; the final

charge of Macdonald’s column which saved and decided the battle for

Napoleon, besides gaining a marshal’s bâton for the Scottish officer

who achieved the feat. That was on the final battlefield of Wagram

itself, the outcome of which tremendous encounter settled the fate

of the war. It was the culminating event of the battle. The crisis

was at hand for both armies when the order was given to Macdonald to

go forward. On the Austrian side the powerful and fresh corps of the

Archduke John was rapidly nearing the scene, and the fortune of the day

yet wavered in the balance. Napoleon, as his last hope and final effort

to break the stubborn Austrian array of the Archduke Charles’ host

which still confronted him, defiant still after ten hours of charges

and counter-charges, holding out tenaciously in a strong position,

massed his reserves and sent them at the centre of the Austrians, to

press forward in a vast column of closely formed battalions. They went

at the enemy with all the daring of a forlorn hope.

[Illustration]

[Sidenote: MACDONALDS’S COLUMN ADVANCES]

“Moving steadily forward through the wreck of guns, the dead, and

the dying, this undaunted column, preceded by its terrific battery

incessantly firing, pushed on half a league beyond the front at other

points of the enemy’s line. In proportion as it advanced, however,

it became enveloped in fire; the guns were gradually dismounted or

silenced, and the infantry emerged through their wreck to the front.

The Austrians drew off their front line upon their second, and both,

falling back, formed a sort of wall on each side of the French column,

from whence issued a dreadful fire of grape and musketry on either

flank of the assailants. Still Macdonald pushed on with unconquerable

resolution: in the midst of a frightful storm of bullets his ranks were

unshaken; the destiny of Europe was in his hands, and he was worthy of

the mission. The loss he experienced, however, was enormous; at every

step huge chasms were made in his ranks, whole files were struck down

by cannon-shot, and at length his eight dense battalions were reduced

to 1,500 men. Isolated in the midst of enemies, this band of heroes was

compelled to halt. The Empire rocked to its foundations: it was the

rout of a similar body of the Guard at Waterloo that hurled Napoleon to

the rock of St. Helena.”

[Sidenote: THE BATTLE WON AT LAST]

The five regiments which formed the spear-point of the attack had

paraded that morning 6,000 strong. They numbered now, the survivors,

less than 300. They were at the extreme point of the advance, but were

held fast and unable to go farther. The enemy were on every side of

them, for in the last moments they had pressed on beyond touch of the

troops that were following next. The Austrians saw their chance to

charge them and annihilate them before the approach of French supports

to the main column could get near. But General Broussier, the Brigadier

in command of the leading troops, knew his work and his men. As they

halted he rapidly rallied the fragments of the nearest regiments and

formed them in a single square. They drew up under the \_feu d’enfer\_

of cannon and musketry, three deep in front, with, in the centre, held

up on high, the five Eagles of the regiments; so as not to weaken the

front, the firing line, “the Eagles were held up only by men who had

been wounded.” Broussier marked the massing of the Eagles in the midst;

and, as the firing round them for one moment seemed to lull, raising

his voice, he called out for all to hear: “Soldiers, swear to die here

to the last man round your Eagles!” “Jurez moi, soldats, de mourir

tous, jusqu’au dernier, autour de vos Aigles!” were the Brigadier’s

words. But there was fortunately no need for all to die. At that moment

reinforcing troops came up, with the Young Guard at their head. The

column, on that, moved forward again with a steady front, “and the

Archduke, despairing now of maintaining his position, when assailed at

the crisis of the day by such a formidable accession of force in the

now broken part of his line, gave directions for a general retreat.”

The Eagles had done their part and the battle of Wagram was won.

CHAPTER VIII

“THE EAGLE WITH THE GOLDEN WREATH” IN LONDON

There are thirteen of Napoleon’s Eagles in England, among the trophies

of the British Army at Chelsea Royal Hospital; or, to speak strictly,

twelve Eagles and a “dummy” Eagle, the later reproduction of a very

famous trophy, gone now, unfortunately, to the melting-pot of a

thieves’ kitchen. It is with the dummy Eagle, as it may be called

for short, without disrespect to its gallant custodians, and five of

the twelve Eagles at Chelsea, that we are for the immediate moment

concerned. That represents the first of Napoleon’s trophies won by

British soldiers in hand-to-hand fight--the once celebrated “Eagle with

the Golden Wreath.”

The story opens on Saturday morning, May 18, 1811, a day that was a

great occasion for Londoners. For the first time, on that Saturday,

trophies taken from Napoleon were publicly displayed in the British

Capital, and no pains were spared to make the most of the event. An

elaborate and dramatic ceremonial was ordained for the occasion by the

authorities at the instance of the Prince Regent. It was like nothing

else of the kind ever witnessed or heard of in England before.

[Sidenote: WHAT LONDON HAD SEEN BEFORE]

On many another day in bygone times London had been the scene of

stately martial pageants in which the victor’s spoils from many

battlefields were borne in triumph, amid blare of trumpets and

clash of drums, to be deposited with due ceremony in their allotted

resting-places. So had it been when the Marlborough trophies from

Blenheim and Ramillies, the captured flags from Dettingen, Louisburg,

and Minden, were borne along the crowded streets, preceded by bands

playing triumphant music and accompanied by armed escorts of Foot and

Horse. Another Saturday, seventeen years before, May 17, 1794, had been

the last occasion of trophy-flags being displayed in London, when the

captured French Republican standards of the garrison of Martinique were

publicly carried through the streets by Life Guards and Grenadiers,

with the band of the First Guards leading the way and the Tower guns

booming out an artillery \_feu de joie\_, from St. James’s Palace to St.

Paul’s, to be received at the great west doors of the Cathedral by the

Dean and Chapter, and laid up “as a lasting memorial of the success of

his Majesty’s Arms.” Some of the flags then displayed hang in the Hall

of Chelsea Hospital to-day.

So, too, had it been in London in yet earlier times, in the far off,

unhappy days of Civil War in England, when the citizens of those

periods, in turn, saw the spoils of Bosworth, and of Marston Moor and

Naseby, of Worcester, Preston, and Dunbar, paraded through their midst,

escorted by mail-clad men-at-arms, on the way to be hung up exultingly

in St. Paul’s Cathedral or in Westminster Hall. With his own Royal

banners from Marston Moor and Naseby drooping down overhead from the

roof of Westminster Hall, Charles the First faced his judges and heard

his fate. But never before in London had so elaborately designed a

ceremony attended the display of trophies taken from any enemy, as that

planned for the \_Royal Depositum\_, as it was officially styled, of the

first of the captured Eagles of Napoleon to be received in England.

There was to be a special display of trophies the London newspapers

announced some days beforehand. The newspapers had not spared

themselves in working up public interest. At the outset they had told

how, on the night of March 24, Captain Hope, First A.D.C. to General

Graham, had arrived in London with the Barrosa despatches and a “French

Eagle with a wreath of gold,” which, it was stated, “the general

trusted his aide de camp might be permitted to lay at his Majesty’s

feet.” Then Londoners were informed that the Barrosa Eagle was a trophy

of unusual importance, and was being kept at the War Office, to be

presented to the Prince Regent at the next \_levée\_. It was announced a

week later that his Royal Highness had been so desirous of seeing it at

once, that the War Minister, the Earl of Liverpool, instead of waiting

five weeks for the \_levée\_, had already presented it to the Prince at

Carlton House. On that came the official notification that “the Eagle

with the Golden Wreath,” as the trophy was everywhere styled, together

with a number of other French trophies, which had been previously

received and had been some time stored away at the War Office

pending instructions as to their disposal, would be deposited in the

Chapel Royal, Whitehall, (now the Museum of the Royal United Service

Institution). “The \_Royal Depositum\_ ceremony will be very grand, and

the martial music appropriate to the occasion, and as the orders have

been issued by direction of his Royal Highness the Prince Regent,

the Chapel will be thronged with nobility.” So one journal notified;

another remarking that “in addition to the great religious and military

ceremony, an anthem is to be performed after the manner of the Te Deum.”

[Sidenote: A GRAND MARTIAL CEREMONY]

Thus popular interest was aroused and kept alive in advance, and the

selected Saturday morning proving fine and pleasant, with the prospect

of a genial and sunny forenoon, Londoners turned out in large numbers

to see the show.

To the Brigade of Guards it fell to carry out the ceremony of the

military reception of the Eagles.

The “Parade in St. James’s Park,” which we know now as the Horse

Guards Parade, was the appointed place for the display, and as the

clock struck nine the preliminaries opened with the arrival of a large

body of Guards’ recruits who were to keep the ground. From quite an

early hour a crowd had been gathering there and along the side of the

Park. Soon afterwards the first of the troops designated to attend the

ceremony began to arrive. These were several companies of the First

Guards and Coldstreamers “in undress, with side arms.” They formed line

along either side of the parade-ground; on one side “extending from

the corner of the Chancellor of the Exchequer’s garden to the Egyptian

gun”; on the opposite side, “from the Admiralty towards the Park.”

To right and left of the archway under the Horse Guards leading to

Whitehall were drawn up the “recruiting parties stationed in the Home

District.”

At a quarter to ten came on the scene the first of the actors in

the day’s proceedings, the “King’s Guard” of the day, “in their

best uniforms, and with sprigs of oak and laurel in their hats.”

Marching up, headed by the combined bands of the First Guards and the

Coldstreamers, with the regimental colour of the First Guards, they

formed on the right, along the open side of the square, facing towards

the Horse Guards. Following them, a few moments later, came the picked

detachment appointed as the “trophy-escort,” furnished jointly by the

grenadier companies of the First Guards and the Coldstreamers. All

were in review-order full dress, “wearing long white gaiters, with oak

and laurel leaves in their hats.” A captain of the First Guards was

in command; and the detachment was made up of two subalterns, four

sergeants, and ninety-six rank and file. They took post on the left

of the King’s Guard. As the trophy-escort halted, up came another

detachment of Guards, a hundred strong, with the Life Guards; marching

across the square and through the Horse Guards archway to line the way

thence to the doors of the Chapel Royal.

[Sidenote: GETTING READY FOR THE PRINCES]

Towards ten o’clock privileged spectators were admitted within the

square, “to stand at an appointed spot”: several veteran generals, “in

their best uniforms and powdered,” as a newspaper reporter remarks;

Lord Liverpool the War Minister; the Earl Marshal; the Speaker; the

Spanish and Portuguese Ambassadors, both gorgeously attired; and “a

number of beautiful and elegant ladies of distinction.”

The Horse Guards clock struck ten, and as the last clanging stroke died

away “the authorities” came clattering on to the ground on horseback:

Sir David Dundas, Commander-in-Chief of the Army and Governor of

Chelsea Hospital, at the head of a number of other plumed and

cocked-hatted generals in full uniform, together with the Head-quarters

Staff at the Horse Guards. Prominent in the glittering array of

gold-laced red coats, “mounted on a cream-coloured Arab,” was General

Sir John Doyle, Colonel of the 87th Royal Irish Fusiliers; the regiment

whose prowess at Barrosa had won the great trophy of the day--“the

Eagle with the Golden Wreath.”

With Royal punctuality, as the clock chimed the half-hour, amid cheers

from the crowd and the spectators filling the windows of the Horse

Guards and Admiralty and other Government offices overlooking the

ground, came riding up the three Princes who were to preside at the

ceremony--the Dukes of York, Cambridge, and Gloucester.

The display began forthwith.

Preceded by the two Guards’ bands playing the “Grenadiers’ March,”

the trophy-escort of grenadiers crossed the Parade at a slow step,

and marched in four divisions, or “platoons,” to the old Tilt Yard

orderly-room under the Horse Guards. There the trophies had been taken

beforehand to be in readiness for the ceremony. The grenadiers halted

before the doors, and the trophies, twelve in number, were brought

out by Lifeguardsmen from the Tilt Yard Guard and committed to the

charge of twelve picked sergeants--six of the First Guards, six of the

Coldstreamers--selected to bear them to the Chapel Royal.

[Sidenote: THE CAPTURED EAGLES TAKE POST]

The trophy-bearers carrying the Eagles then took post according to the

date of the capture of each trophy; the earliest taken of the Eagles

leading. In advance of all, immediately after the band, marched the

three officers with swords drawn; the captain and the two subalterns.

Then, with their flanking grenadiers as escort, a file to each trophy,

came, one after the other, three Battalion Eagles of Napoleon’s 82nd

of the Line, surrendered at the capitulation of Martinique in 1809.

Immediately in rear marched No. 1 platoon of grenadiers; in the

interval between the first trophy-group and the second. That consisted

of the Regimental Eagle of the French 26th of the Line, surrendered at

Martinique at the same time as the Eagles of the 82nd, and then that

of the 66th of the Line, surrendered at the capitulation of Guadaloupe

in 1810, with, just behind them, the all-important trophy of the day,

the first Napoleonic Eagle captured--or, at any rate, taken possession

of--by British soldiers on the battlefield: “the Eagle with the Golden

Wreath”--that Eagle of Napoleon’s 8th Regiment of the Line, won in

hand-to-hand fight by the 87th Royal Irish Fusiliers at Barrosa.

Five of the Eagles had their silken tricolor flags still attached to

the poles. The Barrosa Eagle had none: it showed simply a bare pole

topped by the wreathed Eagle. The wreath, according to a newspaper

reporter present, was “an honour conferred on the regiment for fine

conduct at the battle of Talavera, where they were opposed to the 87th;

and, by a singular coincidence of circumstances, these regiments met in

conflict at Barrosa and recognised each other.” As we shall see, the

statement was a freak of journalistic imagination, without a scrap of

fact behind the story, although, strangely, the legend holds to this

day and reappears periodically in print. Adds the reporter, as to the

appearance of the Eagle, recording this time what he actually saw: “The

Eagle is fixed on a square pedestal, and standing erect on one foot;

the other raised as if grasping something; its wings expanded. It is

about the size of a small pigeon, and appears to be made of bronze, or

of some composition like pinchbeck, gold-gilt.” The “something” which

the talons of the Eagle appeared to be grasping was the “thunderbolt,”

which was missing, having been either knocked out of its place in the

scuffle on the battlefield, or stolen later by somebody for a relic.

The wreath was really of gold. A couple of its leaves picked up on

the field after the battle and given to Major Hugh Gough, the gallant

commander of the 87th at Barrosa, are now in possession of one of that

officer’s descendants.

[Illustration: Plan of the Battle of BARROSA]

The second grenadier platoon divided the Eagles from the first three of

the flag-trophies, borne in file, one by one, in the same way as the

Eagles. The first in date of capture led; a French Republican standard

taken in fight at Sir Ralph Abercombie’s victory at Alexandria, ten

years before, and kept ever since at the War Office: “the Invincible’s

standard.” “As it is falsely called,” adds the reporter; right for

once. “So tattered is it,” he continues, “that the mottoes are

not legible; a bugle in the centre was the only figure we could

distinguish.” Two flags taken by Wellington’s men in the Peninsula

accompanied the Alexandria flag: “a Fort Standard,” as it is described,

and the battalion colour, or “fanion,” of the Second Battalion of

Napoleon’s 5th of the Line.[23]

[Sidenote: THE TROPHY FLAGS PARADED]

In rear of the colour of the 5th marched the third grenadier platoon,

and the last three trophies sent to England by Wellington. Two were

a pair of tattered German standards, the flags of the two battalions

of a Prussian regiment in Napoleon’s service, composed of unfortunate

soldiers levied compulsorily during the French occupation of their

country, and tramped off to Spain to meet their fate under British

bullets. Each flag bore the legend “L’Empereur des Français au Régiment

Prussien” on one side, and “Valeur et Discipline” on the other, and was

mounted on a staff with a steel pike-head instead of an Eagle. They

were silken flags of the ordinary Napoleonic pattern. The third flag

of the group was that of a “provisional regiment”; also with a steel

pike-head to its staff.

From the Tilt Yard orderly-room the trophies and their escort-guard

set off, as before, in slow time, the bands playing “God save the

King!” The sergeants, carrying the Eagles and Flags between the files

of grenadiers, marched in the intervals between the four divisions “in

double open-order with arms advanced.” Right round the square they now

passed, close along the lines of the troops drawn up, “the immense

multitude rending the air with huzzas.” In front of the First Guards,

in front of the recruiting parties, in front of the long line of

Coldstreamers, along each of the three sides of the square, paced the

procession with martial pomp to the stately music of the two bands as

they led the way. Then it proceeded along the fourth side of the square

until it came face to face with the King’s Guard, all standing with

ordered arms, not at the present.

There was a brief pause in front of the Colour of the King’s Guard.

That was the supreme moment of the display. Now took place the formal

act of obeisance to the victors; the formal act of abasement and

humiliation for the vanquished. Amid redoubled cheering from all sides,

the Eagles and the other flags were, one and all, formally dipped and

prostrated. “The captured standards saluted and were lowered to the

ground in token of submission.”

[Sidenote: PROSTRATED IN THE DUST]

The procession turned away in front of the King’s Guard and led round

in front of the three Royal Dukes, seated on their chargers, a little

in advance of the Commander-in-Chief and Horse Guards Staff, at the

centre of the parade-ground. Again, as they now passed before the Royal

trio, the hapless Eagles of Napoleon and the other French flags in turn

were one by one made to pay homage, bowed grovelling to the dust; the

crowd of onlookers shouting themselves hoarse “with,” as we are told,

“truly British huzzas.”

After that the trophy procession marched across to the Horse Guards

archway, and through to Whitehall and the Chapel Royal; between Life

Guards on one side and more Foot Guards on the other, drawn up to keep

a lane open through the immense crowd of people who had gathered there,

and thronged the wide roadway. “The procession,” says our reporter,

“moved off the Parade amid the acclamations of many thousand spectators

and entered the Chapel as the clock was striking eleven, which [\_sic\_]

was crowded by all the beauty and fashion in Town.” Another reporter

speaks of the Chapel Royal as being “exceedingly crowded in all parts

with nobility and gentlemen and ladies of distinction.”

“The religious part of the ceremony,” we are told, “was solemn and

impressive.” It comprised Morning Prayer and a sermon by the Sub-Dean.

“Previous to the commencement of the Te Deum, a pause was made, when

three grenadier sergeants entered at each door by the sides of the

Altar with the Eagles on black poles about 8 feet high. They took

their stations in front of the Altar. Each party was guarded by a

file of grenadiers, commanded by two officers; the whole of them with

laurel-leaves in their caps as emblems of Victory. At the same instant

the five French flags and Bonaparte’s honourable standard entered

the upper gallery at the back of the Altar, all carried by grenadier

sergeants.

“The whole remained presented for some time for the gratification of

the beholders, after which the Eagles were placed in brass sockets on

each side of the Altar, suspended by brass chains. The five flags

were suspended from the front of the second gallery, and Bonaparte’s

honourable standard placed over the door of the second gallery, behind

the others.”

The trophies, with others won at Salamanca and Waterloo, and

subsequently laid up in the Chapel Royal, were removed later to Chelsea

Royal Hospital, where all, except “the Eagle with the Golden Wreath,”

are now kept treasured amid befitting surroundings.

[Sidenote: STOLEN FROM CHELSEA AT MIDDAY]

“The Eagle with the Golden Wreath” disappeared from Chelsea Hospital

in broad daylight. It was displayed in the Chapel, affixed in front of

the organ-loft over the doorway, until it suddenly vanished from there

a little after midday on Friday, April 16, 1852, in the absence of the

pensioner-custodian of the Chapel during the Hospital dinner-hour. How

it was stolen was apparent; but the thief was never traced. The thief,

attracted undoubtedly by the widely told story that the wreath was of

gold, made his way into the Chapel by the roof, which was undergoing

repairs at the time, to which he got access by a workman’s ladder. He

got inside by the trap-door on the leads above the organ-loft. There,

with a saw, he cut through the Eagle-pole near where it was fastened

to the organ-loft, and, secreting it under his coat, made his escape

by the way he had come, unseen by anybody. The Eagle-pole was found

outside, in front of the building, with the Eagle and wreath wrenched

off. For some reason the Royal Hospital authorities of the day offered

a reward of only a sovereign, and though the London police did their

best, the malefactor was never discovered.[24]

At Barrosa Napoleon’s 8th of the Line was in the French column that

made its attack on the right. It was one of the regiments that charged

forward across the plain at the foot of Barrosa ridge, to break through

General Graham’s second brigade and drive it back to the edge of the

cliffs by the seashore, while the French left attack seized the ridge

itself, and beat back the British first brigade in the act of hastening

to regain that unwisely abandoned position. The Eagle went down in the

fierce counter-attack with which Graham’s men on the plain, the 87th

Royal Irish Fusiliers in the front line, met the French onset.

[Sidenote: “IMPOSSIBLE TO STOP THEM”]

What befell the 8th of the Line is told by one of their own officers in

his \_Journal de Guerre\_--Lieutenant-Colonel Vigo-Roussillon, in command

of the First Battalion, with which was the Eagle.

Just before the critical moment, says Colonel Roussillon, the 8th,

who were on the flank of the French second line, lost touch with

the regiment next them, and had in consequence to meet the 87th by

themselves. They fired their hardest as the British troops came on,

“but could not stop them, ever advancing to a bayonet attack.”

They came on silently, steadily, irresistibly. “Their officers,” adds

one of Victor’s staff, “kept up all the time the old custom of striking

with their canes those of the men who fell out of the ranks. Our own

non-commissioned officers,” he adds, “placed as a supernumerary rank,

crossed their muskets behind the squads, thus forming buttresses which

kept the ranks from giving way. Several of the French officers, also,

picked up the muskets of the wounded, and flung themselves into the

gaps made in the ranks of the men.”

“I saw the English line,” describes Colonel Roussillon again, “at sixty

paces continuing to advance at a slow step without firing. It seemed

impossible to stop them; we had not sufficient men.”

Apparently he then caught sight of General Graham, leading the British

line.

“Under the influence of a sort of despair, I urged forward my charger,

a strong Polish horse, against an English mounted officer who seemed

to be the colonel of the nearest regiment coming on at us. I got up to

him, and was about to run him through with my sword, when I was held

back by a sense of compassion and abandoned the murderous thought. He

was an officer with white hair and a fine figure, and had his hat in

his hand, and was cheering on his men. His calmness and noble air of

dignity irresistibly arrested my arm.”

Such is the lieutenant-colonel’s own account. But did he really get

quite close to the general? Graham was the last man in the world to let

him get back unfought!

“I then,” as Vigo-Roussillon continues, “quickly galloped back to my

own men, and was riding along the line, telling them to meet the enemy

with our bayonets, and drive them back, when a bullet from an English

marksman broke my right leg.

“I managed to dismount and tried to pass through in rear of the line,

but it was impossible to walk. The ground was covered with thick

bushes, and I was crippled and in great pain. All I could do was to sit

down where I was, calling on the men to fire again. A moment later I

was enveloped in smoke; and at the same instant the English charged in

among us.

“I called out my loudest, cheering on my men; and now two soldiers

tried to lift me up and carry me. But both were shot down.

“For the time we held our own, and kept the enemy back; but some of the

English got round us. Seeing themselves outflanked, the battalion began

to give ground. Then came a second furious charge from the English, and

that broke us.”

[Sidenote: “FIGHTING WITH THEIR FISTS”]

The fight, man to man, went on desperately for several minutes--some of

the British soldiers, as yet another French officers relates, fighting

with their fists. “Many of the Englishmen broke their weapons in

striking with the butts or bayonets; but they never seemed to think of

using the swords they wore at their sides. They went on fighting with

their fists.”

It was in the final \_mêlée\_ that “the Eagle with the Golden Wreath” was

taken; after a sharp and fierce hand-to-hand fight round it.

Colonel Roussillon himself was at almost the same moment struck

down, and lay insensible for a space among the dead near by. He was

recovering his senses and trying to stand up, when, as he tells, a

British sergeant saw him and ran at him with his halberd. He parried

the thrust, and kept the sergeant off, and then a British officer came

up. To him the Commandant of the First Battalion of the 8th surrendered

his sword.

The fight for the Eagle--on one hand to take it, on the other to keep

it--was furious; desperately and heroically contested by both sides.

First, a gallant Irish boy, from Kilkenny, Ensign Edward Keogh of the

87th, caught sight of it, borne on high above the fray. There had been

no unscrewing of the Eagle of the 8th, no trying to break it from its

pole. “See that Eagle, sergeant!” called Keogh to Sergeant Masterton,

among the foremost, close by his officer; and then he dashed straight

into the thick of the party round the Eagle, sword in hand. The brave

lad cut his way through, with Masterton and four or five privates close

behind him. He got close up to the “Porte-Aigle,” crossed swords with

him, and got a grip of the Eagle-pole. But he could not wrench it from

the no less brave Frenchman’s hands before he went down with half a

dozen musket bullets and bayonet stabs in his body.

Porte-Aigle Guillemin, as the gallant French Eagle-bearer of the 8th

was named, fell dead at the same moment, shot through the head by one

of the British privates.

[Sidenote: HOW THE TUSSLE ENDED]

Instantly other Frenchmen rushed up to save the Eagle, and formed round

it hastily. One of the British privates who seized hold of the staff

was slashed to death, and the French recovered it. The fight round

the Eagle went on for some minutes. In that time no fewer than seven

French officers and sub-officers fell dead in defence of the Eagle.

An eighth officer, Lieutenant Gazan, clung to the pole to the last,

regardless of wounds that nearly hacked him to pieces. Finally the

Eagle was torn from his grasp by Sergeant Masterton, at the end the

sole unwounded survivor of the attacking British party. Gazan “survived

miraculously,” and lived to be decorated by Napoleon for his devoted

courage. Masterton seized the Eagle and kept it. So “the Eagle with the

Golden Wreath” became a British trophy.

From the crossing of the bayonets in the final charge to the taking of

the Eagle, the \_mêlée\_ lasted about fifteen minutes.

The remnant of the 8th were saved by a rally to the spot by the French

54th, after another regiment, the 47th, had attempted its rescue in

vain. The 47th lost their Eagle in the \_mêlée\_, but recovered it. “The

man who had charge of it was obliged to throw it away, from excessive

fatigue and a wound,” explains a British officer. The 8th lost at

Barrosa their Colonel (Autié) and the Lieutenant-Colonel of the Second

Battalion, killed; Vigo-Roussillon, of the First Battalion, wounded;

and 17 other officers and 934 of the rank and file killed or wounded.

The \_Moniteur\_, the official Paris newspaper under the Napoleonic

\_régime\_, in reporting the battle of April 5, referred to the loss of

the Eagle in these terms: “A battalion of the 8th, having been charged

in wood-covered ground, and the Eagle-bearer being killed, his Eagle

has not been found since.”

The battalion that fared so hardly had to pay the regulation penalty.

Napoleon gave the 8th no other Eagle. He held rigidly to his rule, and

set his face relentlessly against a second presentation. They must

present him first with a standard taken on the battlefield from the

enemy. But with Wellington’s men opposed to them to the end, the 8th

got few chances in that direction. They had to fight without an Eagle

to the close of the Peninsular War.

Two days after Barrosa, when General Graham re-entered Cadiz with the

Spanish army, “the Eagle with the Golden Wreath” was publicly paraded

through the crowded streets, “between the regimental colours,” as the

87th marched to barracks, the church bells ringing triumphantly, and

amid exultant shouts and cheers of the populace, and cries of “Long

live Spain! Death to our oppressors!” At the barracks “we presented the

Eagle to our gallant commander,” says one of the officers.

The Eagle was then sent to England in the custody of the officer

carrying General Graham’s despatch. Its capture is commemorated to this

day by the Royal Irish Fusiliers, who wear “an Eagle with a Wreath of

Laurel” as a regimental badge, while a similar Eagle is embroidered

in gold on the regimental colour. Also, a representation of the

wreathed Barrosa Eagle was granted later on as a special augmentation

to the family arms of the officer who commanded the 87th in the

battle, Major Hugh Gough, on his being raised to the Peerage while

Commander-in-Chief in India after the first Sikh War. “The Aiglers” was

always the regiment’s sobriquet after Barrosa among their comrades in

Wellington’s army; a sobriquet that has endured since then in the form

of “the Aigle-Takers,” although our modern recruits are said to prefer

calling themselves “the Bird-Catchers.”[25]

[Sidenote: ONE OF THE PARIS WREATHS]

It was in this way that the Barrosa trophy Eagle came by its golden

wreath. The decoration, as has been said, had nothing to do with

Talavera.

The wreath was one of those voted by the City of Paris to the regiments

that had gone through the Jena and Polish frontier campaigns, the first

of which was presented to the Imperial Guard. First of all, in the

outburst of patriotic enthusiasm in France at the news of Jena, wreaths

had been voted as decorations for the Eagles, by way of popular tribute

to the regiments which had helped in dealing that staggering blow to

the famous Prussian Army. After the crowning victory of Friedland

which ended the war, in a fresh outburst of enthusiasm, golden wreaths

were voted wholesale for the Eagles of all the corps that had taken

part in the fighting that followed Jena, during the nine months of

war, down to the final day of Friedland. It was a costly guerdon, and

their proposed generosity staggered the Paris municipality when the

estimate was presented. No fewer than 378 wreaths--according to the

official return--had to be provided. But the vote had been carried by

acclamation on its first proposal, and trumpeted all over France. Also,

the Emperor had taken up with the idea warmly. The Paris authorities

dared not back out, and had to go on with it in spite of the cost. They

carried it out with so good a grace that, as the sequel, a suggestion

came from the Tuileries that the Austerlitz battalions of the Grand

Army which had not had the fortune to be in the Jena-Friedland campaign

should receive wreaths as well, an Imperial hint that the authorities,

shrinking from the extra expense, were so slow to fall in with, that

in the end it had to be forced on them, by means of a bluntly worded

letter through the Ministry of War. “Tell the Prefect of the Seine,”

wrote Napoleon to the War Minister, “that I expect wreaths of gold,

similar to those given for Jena and Friedland, to be provided on behalf

of the City of Paris for all the regiments at Austerlitz!”

[Sidenote: ACROSS GERMANY IN CARTS]

The 8th was presented with its wreath in Paris, while on the way to

take part in the Peninsular War. It was one of the regiments of the

First Corps of the Grand Army, which Napoleon hastily recalled from

Germany in the spring of 1808, and hurried across Europe to reinforce

the troops in Spain on the first news of serious trouble being on foot

in that quarter. The whole First Army Corps was recalled; starting

from Berlin, where it had been quartered, and journeying by Magdeburg

and Coblentz. Along the route the unfortunate German burgomasters and

village authorities had to provide, not only provisions day by day, but

transport vehicles for 30,000 soldiers; mostly farm-carts and wagons,

each taking from four to sixteen men. The troops travelled by night and

day, with only two stoppages of fifty minutes each in the twenty-four

hours, for meals, and the authorities of the villages and towns named

as halting-places were compelled to have hot food kept ready so that

the men might fall to instantly on arrival. It was a journey the

soldiers never forgot. The weather was rough and wet, the roads in

places were almost impassable, and the carts continually broke down, in

addition to which the peasant-drivers requisitioned for the conveyances

deserted at every opportunity, usually going off at night with the

horses after cutting the traces, leaving their wagon-loads of sleeping

soldiers stranded by the roadside.

The 8th received its wreath at the Barrier of Pantin, on the outskirts

of Paris. It arrived with the Second Division of the corps, and

the troops were met by the Prefect of the Seine and the Municipal

Council in State, while Marshal Victor, the commander of the Army

Corps, attended the ceremony in full-dress uniform. He replied to the

Prefect’s complimentary address by declaring that “these golden crowns

henceforward decorating the Eagles of the First Corps will to them ever

be additional incentives to victory.” One by one the regiments passed

before the Prefect, who hung round each Eagle’s neck “a wreath of gold,

shaped as two branches of laurel.” A triumphal march into Paris and an

open-air banquet to all ranks in the Tivoli Gardens, with free tickets

to the theatres after it, wound up the day.

All along the line of march through France to the Spanish frontier,

banquets and elaborate festivities welcomed the regiments--and at the

same time, it would appear, gave some of their entertainers more than

they bargained for. The triumphal progress, from all accounts, proved

such hard work for the ladies in the country towns, where public balls

were in the programme every night, that at some places for the later

comers--the 8th and other regiments in the Second Division of Marshal

Victor’s corps--the balls had to be abandoned, “because the ladies were

too tired to dance any more.” It was explained, with apologies, that

they had practically been danced off their feet by the regiments of

the First Division, which had preceded the Second, incessantly passing

through during the previous three weeks, and that “most of the ladies,

through sheer fatigue, had taken to their beds!”

[Sidenote: THEY DID NOT MEET AT TALAVERA]

At Talavera, the 8th, as part of a brigade of three regiments, had a

passage of arms on the battlefield, first with the British 83rd; and

then with the Guards; lastly with the 48th, before whose magnificent

charge in the final phase of the fight they had to give ground. They

did not meet the 87th Royal Irish Fusiliers at all in the battle.[26]

CHAPTER IX

OTHER EAGLES IN ENGLAND FROM BATTLEFIELDS OF SPAIN

Napoleon’s Eagles made a second appearance before the London populace

in the following year. That was on September 30, 1812, and the Horse

Guards Parade was again the scene of the display--this time with more

elaborate ceremonial, and with the added presence of yet greater

personages. Queen Charlotte herself this time witnessed the reception

ceremony, with four of the Princesses; and the Prince Regent in person,

“mounted on a white charger,” attended, to be publicly done obeisance

to by the humbled standards of the enemy. Four of his Royal brothers,

the Dukes of Clarence, York, Cambridge, and Sussex, accompanied the

Prince Regent. Only the poor old King, blind and insane, was absent of

the Royal family, remaining in his seclusion at Windsor Castle.

The Queen and Princesses watched the scene from the windows of the

Levée Room at the Horse Guards, looking down over the Parade; the

Prince Regent was on the ground and took the salute. The Eagles this

time were five in number; and four French flags, one of exceptional

interest, the garrison-standard of Badajoz, were with them in the

procession.

The military display was on the grandest scale possible; the \_ensemble\_

making up, as we are told, “a spectacle grand and impressive beyond

anything ever beheld.” The First and Second Life Guards were present,

“drawn up in a line reaching from the Foreign Office nearly to Carlton

House,” with their bands in State dress and their standards. All three

regiments of Foot Guards took part, with the State Colour of the First

Guards, and three bands. Horse and Foot Artillery from Woolwich were

also there; forming by themselves one side of the great hollow square

which occupied the wide space of the ground, the scene of the reception

of “the Eagle with the Golden Wreath.” Ninety grenadiers, drawn from

the three regiments of Foot Guards, thirty from each, formed the

trophy-escort, which, as before, accompanied the Eagles and captured

standards round the square at a slow march--the five Eagles in advance

by themselves, borne by as many Guards’ sergeants between files of

grenadiers with fixed bayonets.

[Sidenote: THE EAGLES ARE HUMBLED AGAIN]

Again the trophies of Napoleon were spared nothing in the humiliation

that they had to undergo. Twice were they lowered to the dust before

the Queen; twice to the Prince Regent; eight times before the standards

of the Life Guards; three times before the standards of the Guards

and the King’s Colour of the First Guards, “the immense concourse of

spectators rending the air with their huzzas” every time the trophies

went down. Then, as before, the trophies were paraded across Whitehall

to the Chapel Royal, and solemnly “churched” and hung up there, before

the Royal family and “all the Cabinet Ministers and the leading members

of the nobility in London.”

They were this time all Wellington’s trophies. Two of the Eagles

were spoils from the battle of Salamanca--“dreadfully mutilated and

disfigured in the conflict,” according to a newspaper reporter’s

account, “one of them having lost its head, part of the neck, one leg,

half the thunderbolt, and the distinctive number; the other without one

leg and the thunderbolt.” Two had been taken in Madrid “in more perfect

state and without their flags.” The last of the five had been “found on

the way to Ciudad Rodrigo, in the bed of a river, dried up in summer,

having been thrown away some months before during Masséna’s retreat.”

The four Eagles which still bore distinctive numbers were, we are told,

“those of the 22nd, 13th, and 51st and the 39th.” Of the standards, the

garrison flag of Badajoz looked “like a sieve, a great part of it quite

red with human blood”; the four other colours “were so mutilated that

not a letter or device was legible.”

How we came by the trophies so displayed in London on that Wednesday

forenoon is our story.

The two Salamanca Eagles were--and are, for they have a place to-day

among our Chelsea Hospital trophies--mementoes of one of the most

dramatic episodes of a battle in which there were many.

[Sidenote: WELLINGTON AND SALAMANCA]

Salamanca, it may be said incidentally--the battle, like Waterloo,

was fought on a Sunday, on July 22, 1812--was, in Wellington’s own

eyes, his \_chef d’œuvre\_, his masterpiece, although it may be rather

overlooked now perhaps by most of us and the world at large, eclipsed

in the dazzling splendour of the last crowning victory of Waterloo. It

was at Salamanca that Wellington, in the words of a French officer,

speaking, of course, in general terms, “defeated 40,000 men in forty

minutes.” The victory was held in such estimation by Wellington himself

that he selected it in preference to all his other victories to be

displayed over again in a sham fight on the Plain of Saint-Denis in the

presence of the three Allied Sovereigns during the occupation of Paris

in 1815 after Waterloo. Of it he wrote at the time: “I never saw an

army receive such a beating.”

Upwards of 6,000 prisoners were taken, including one general and 136

other officers. Six thousand of the enemy, at the lowest computation,

were left dead or wounded on the field of battle. Three French

generals were killed and three wounded. Marshal Marmont himself, the

enemy’s commander-in-chief, was among the wounded; grievously maimed

by a bursting shell as he galloped to rally one of his broken columns.

“Spurring furiously to the point of danger, he was struck by the

fragment of a shell, which shattered his left arm and tore open his

side.” Marmont bore the arm in a sling for the rest of his life. He was

carried off the field under fire, on a stretcher made of a soldier’s

great-coat with a couple of muskets thrust through the armholes to

give it shape, under the escort of a squad of grenadiers. Eleven

cannon--melted down at Woolwich Arsenal in 1820 as a cheap way of

making new field-guns for the British Army--with the two Eagles and six

stand of colours, were the trophies of the day.

The two Salamanca trophy Eagles at Chelsea Hospital are the spoils of

the fiercest cavalry charge that British horsemen ever delivered on a

battlefield; the death-ride--for 1,200 of Napoleon’s infantry--of the

Heavy Brigade, which annihilated an entire French division in less

than a quarter of an hour. It came about as one of the results of that

opening false move on the part of the French commander which cost

France in the end the loss of the battle.

[Sidenote: MARMONT’S FATAL BLUNDER]

Marmont, after a series of ably conducted manœuvres in the

neighbourhood of Salamanca, had forced Wellington, on July 22, into a

position so unfavourable that the British commander decided to retire

towards the Portuguese frontier under cover of darkness during the

following night. But at the last moment the French marshal overreached

himself. Taking in the difficulties that confronted his opponent he

attempted to anticipate him and cut him off from his base by barring

the one line of retreat that was open to Wellington. In doing that,

Marmont gave his game away. He rashly divided his force in the presence

of the enemy, separating his left wing to a distance from the main body

and marching off a whole division of infantry, cavalry, and artillery

to occupy the road to Ciudad Rodrigo.

The fault was flagrant, and Wellington seized eagerly at the chance all

unexpectedly offered him. He was at breakfast when Marmont’s troops

began their false move and the aide de camp whom he had posted on

the look-out hurriedly came to him with the news. “I think they are

extending to the left----” the young officer began. He did not finish

the sentence.

“The devil they are!” interposed Wellington hastily, with his mouth

full. “Give me the glass!”

He took it, and for nearly a minute scanned the movements of the enemy

with fixed attention.

“By God!” he ejaculated abruptly as he lowered the glass. “That’ll do!”

He turned to another aide de camp.

“Ride off and tell Clinton and Leith to return to their former ground.”

These were the generals commanding the Fifth and Sixth Divisions, on

the right and right-centre of the British position. Then Wellington

ordered up his horse. Closing his spy-glass with a snap, he turned with

these words to his Spanish attaché, Colonel Alava: “Mon cher Alava,

Marmont est perdu!” A moment later Wellington was on horseback and his

staff also, all galloping off.

Wellington grasped the meaning of Marmont’s move. He saw his chance of

falling on in force and overpowering the detached French wing before

help could reach it.

He made his way as fast as his charger could carry him to the British

Third Division--Picton’s men, temporarily commanded by Wellington’s

brother-in-law, General Sir Edward Pakenham.

“As he rode up to Pakenham,” says an officer whose regiment was close

by, “every eye was turned on him. He looked paler than usual, but was

quite unruffled in his manner, and as calm as if the battle to be

fought was nothing more than an ordinary assemblage of troops for a

field-day.”

“Ned,” said Wellington, as he drew rein beside Pakenham, tapping him

on the shoulder and pointing in the direction of the separated French

column as its leading troops were beginning to move towards their

distant position, “Ned, d’ye see those fellows on the hill? Throw your

division in column, and at ’em and drive ’em to the Devil!”

“I will, my lord, by God!” was Pakenham’s laconic reply, and he turned

away to give the necessary orders.

[Sidenote: A FURIOUS COUNTER-ATTACK]

The two Eagles were taken in the course of Pakenham’s attack, when

the Third Division, with the Fifth advancing on one flank, was moving

forward to meet the fierce counter-attack with which the enemy, after

the first collision, attempted to make amends for their commander’s

blunder.

“We were assailed,” describes a British officer in the Third Division,

“by a multitude who, reinforced, again rallied and turned upon us

with fury. The peals of musketry along the centre continued without

intermission, the smoke was so thick that nothing to our left was

distinguishable; some men of the Fifth Division got intermingled with

ours; the dry grass was set on fire by the numerous cartridge-papers

that strewed the battlefield; the air was scorching; and the smoke

rolling onwards in huge volumes, nearly suffocated us.”

In the midst of the din and turmoil the Heavy Cavalry came suddenly on

the scene. “A loud cheering was heard in our rear; the Brigade half

turned round, supposing themselves about to be attacked by the French

cavalry. A few seconds passed, the trampling of horses was heard, the

smoke cleared away, and the Heavy Brigade of Le Marchant was seen

coming forward in line at a canter. ‘Open right and left!’ was an order

quickly obeyed; the line opened, and the cavalry passed through the

intervals, and, forming rapidly in our front, prepared for their work.”

Catastrophe for the French assailants followed at once; swift,

overwhelming, irremediable. The enemy in front had practically ceased

to exist within the next twelve minutes. The entire French division

and its supporting troops were struck down and shattered; broken to

fragments and annihilated.

There was a “whirling cloud of dust, moving swiftly forward and

carrying within its womb the trampling sound of a charging multitude.

As it passed the left of the Third Division, Le Marchant’s heavy

horsemen, flanked by Anson’s Light Cavalry, broke out at full speed,

and the next instant 1,200 French infantry, formed in several lines,

were trampled down with terrible clangour and tumult. Bewildered and

blinded they cast away their arms and ran through the openings of the

British squadron, stooping and demanding quarter, while the dragoons,

big men on big horses, rode on hard, smiting with their long,

glittering swords in uncontrollable power, and the Third Division,

following at speed, shouted as the French masses fell in succession

before this dreadful charge.”

So Napier describes the onset.

[Sidenote: CHARGING DOWN AT FULL GALLOP]

Startled and aghast at what they saw coming at them, the French

attempted hastily to form squares. But Le Marchant’s impetuous

squadrons were too quick for them. They came swooping down, the

troopers galloping their hardest, with loosened reins, all racing

forward, charging down with the irresistible sweep of an avalanche, and

crashed into the midst of the ill-fated infantrymen before the squares

could be formed.

Down on the enemy the cavalry thundered, 1,200 flashing British

sabres. Three of the finest regiments of the British Army formed the

brigade--the 3rd Dragoons, the “King’s Own”; the 4th, “Queen’s Own”;

the 5th Dragoon Guards--strong and burly men on big-boned horses,

and with sharp-edged swords. “\_Nec aspera terrent\_” was--and is--the

fearless motto of the gallant “King’s Own,” who showed the way; and

they flinched at nothing that day. “\_Vestigia nulla retrorsum\_”

was--and is--the motto of the 5th, who closed the column; and dead

and wounded and prisoners were the vestiges they left in rear on that

stricken field.

General Edward Le Marchant, a daring and capable soldier--“a most

noble officer,” was what Wellington called him--led them.

[Sidenote: FOUR REGIMENTS CUT TO PIECES]

A French regiment a little in advance, the ill-fated 62nd of the Line,

was the first to face the British, and to go down. They did not attempt

to form square. They had, indeed, no time to do so. Yet they were

in a formation sufficiently formidable. The 62nd was a regiment of

three battalions, and stood formed up in a column of half-battalions,

presenting six successive lines closely massed one behind the other.

Their front ranks opened fire just before the leading horsemen reached

them, but it did not check the British onset even for a moment. The

cavalry bore vigorously forward at a gallop and burst into and through

their column, riding it down on the spot. Nearly the whole regiment was

killed, wounded, or taken; leaving the broken remnants to be carried

off as prisoners by the infantry of the Third Division as these raced

up in rear, clearing the ground before them.

The 62nd were disposed of by the cavalry in less than two minutes.

According to French official returns, the unlucky regiment, out of

a total strength that morning of 2,800 of all ranks in its three

battalions, lost 20 officers and 1,100 men in killed alone; the

survivors who escaped capture not being sufficient to form half a

battalion.

Cheering triumphantly, the charging squadrons dashed on. They came

full tilt on a second French regiment, the 22nd, catching it in the

act of forming square. The front face of the square was already drawn

up and met the troopers with a hasty volley which brought down some of

the men and horses. But that made little difference. The next moment

the cavalry were on them. The mass of the square in rear made but a

weak effort at resistance. They swayed back, broke their ranks, and

fell apart in utter confusion. Slashed down right and left, as had

been the case with the 62nd, in little more than a minute only groups

of fugitives were left, to be made prisoners by the British infantry,

following in rear of the horsemen.

The cavalry raced on then to attack a third French regiment. In turn it

attempted to make a stand, but only to be dealt with in like manner.

It, too, was caught before its square could be formed, and was ridden

down.

Yet another French battalion confronted the British troopers after

that. It had had time to take advantage of a small copse, an open wood

of evergreen oaks, where it formed its ranks in \_colonne serrée\_, to

await attack, and make a stand. “The men reserved their fire with much

coolness, until the cavalry came within twenty yards. Then they poured

it in on the concentrated mass of men and horses with deadly effect.

Nearly a third of the dragoons came to the ground, but the remainder

had sufficient command of their horses to dash forward. They succeeded

in breaking the French ranks and dispersing them in utter confusion

over the field.”

All the time the infantry in rear were racing on with exultant cheers,

finishing off the horsemen’s work as fast as they came up. It was

an easy task. Further fight had been scared out of the French under

the stress of the fearful experience they had gone through. “Such as

got away from the sabres of the horsemen,” says one of the British

officers, “sought safety amongst the ranks of our infantry; and,

scrambling under their horses, ran to us for protection, like men who,

having escaped the first shock of a wreck, will cling to any broken

spar, no matter how little to be depended on. Hundreds of beings,

frightfully disfigured, in whom the human face and form were almost

obliterated--black with dust, worn down with fatigue, and covered with

sabre-cuts and blood--threw themselves among us for safety. Not a man

was bayoneted--not one even molested or plundered. The invincible old

Third on this day surpassed themselves; for they not only defeated

their terrible enemies in a fair stand-up fight, but saved them when

total annihilation seemed the only thing.”

The two Salamanca Eagles were taken now. They fell to two infantry

officers as their actual captors: one to an officer of a regiment of

the Third Division, and the other to an officer of the Fifth Division,

which had come into the fight, and were following the cavalry, partly

mingled with Pakenham’s men.

[Sidenote: TAKEN IN HAND-TO-HAND FIGHT]

The first Eagle--that of the hapless French 62nd, whose fate has been

told--fell to Lieutenant Pierce of the 44th, a regiment in the Fifth

Division. He came on the Eagle-bearer while in the act of unscrewing

the Eagle from its pole in order to hide it under his long overcoat and

get away with it. Pierce sprang on the Frenchman, and tussled with him

for the Eagle. The second Porte-Aigle joined in the fight, whereupon

three men of the 44th ran to their officer’s assistance. A third

Frenchman, a private, added himself to the combatants, and was in the

act of bayoneting the British lieutenant, when one of the men of the

44th, Private Finlay, shot him through the head and saved the officer’s

life. Both the Porte-Aigles were killed a moment later--one by

Lieutenant Pierce, who snatched the Eagle from its dead bearer’s hands.

In his excitement over the prize Pierce rewarded the privates who had

helped him by emptying his pockets on the spot, and dividing what money

he had on him amongst them--twenty dollars. A sergeant’s halberd was

then procured, on which the Eagle was stuck and carried triumphantly

through the remainder of the battle. Lieutenant Pierce presented it

next morning to General Leith, the Commander of the Fifth Division, who

directed him to carry it to Wellington. In honour of the exploit the

44th, now the Essex Regiment, bear the badge of a Napoleonic Eagle on

the regimental colour, and the officers wear a similar badge on their

mess-jackets.

The second Eagle taken was that of the 22nd of the Line. It was

captured by a British officer of the 30th, Ensign Pratt, attached

for duty to Major Cruikshank’s 7th Portuguese, a Light Infantry (or

Caçadores) battalion, serving with the Third Division. He took it to

General Pakenham, whose mounted orderly displayed the Eagle of the 22nd

publicly after the battle, “carrying it about wherever the general went

for the next two days.”

Two more Eagles, it was widely reported in the Army, came into the

possession of other regiments of the Third and Fifth Divisions. One of

them is said to have “wanted its head and number”; but what became of

them is unknown. Possibly the existence of these particular trophies

was merely camp gossip. According to one story, an officer picked

up one of the Eagles during the battle and “carried it about in his

cap for some days.” No Eagles, however, reached head-quarters after

Salamanca except those of the 62nd and 22nd, which in due course were

sent to England.[27]

[Sidenote: ONE THAT JUST ESCAPED]

One Eagle narrowly evaded capture at the hands of the Hanoverian

Dragoons of the King’s German Legion in the pursuit after Salamanca.

It escaped--to find its way to Chelsea Hospital on a later day, as the

famous trophy of our own 1st Dragoons, the “Royals,” at Waterloo. What

took place when the Eagle of the 105th of the Line so nearly fell into

the enemy’s hands after Salamanca is a story that in its incidents

stands by itself.

General Anson’s cavalry brigade, made up of British Light Dragoons

and the Hanoverians, was sent in chase to follow and break up the

wreck of the defeated army. It came upon the French rearguard in the

act of taking post at a place called Garcia Hernandez. In front were

several squadrons of cavalry; in rear the 105th of the Line. The three

battalions of the regiment were moving in column, with guns in the

intervals. Not seeing the French infantry and guns at first, owing

to an intervening ridge, Anson rode for the cavalry and drove them

in. “Their squadrons fled from Anson’s troopers, abandoning three

battalions of infantry, who in separate columns were making up a hollow

slope, hoping to gain the crest of some heights before the pursuing

cavalry could fall on, and the two foremost did reach higher ground,

and there formed in squares.” The squares at once opened fire on the

horsemen, and for a moment checked them.

[Sidenote: A SQUARE CHARGED AND BROKEN]

The Hanoverian Dragoons were the nearest of the pursuers to the

rearmost of the French squares, and there was no way to ride past

without exposing their flank at close range. Captain Von Decken, who

was leading the dragoons, on the spur of the moment took the daring

decision to attack the square with the single squadron he had with him,

then and there. Without an instant’s hesitation the gallant captain

charged, regardless of the fierce fusillade that met him at once, from

which his men went down all round. They dropped fast under fire. By

twos, by threes, by tens, all round they fell; yet the rest of them,

surmounting the difficulties of the ground, hurled themselves in a mass

on the column and went clean through it.

The gallant Von Decken was among the first to go down, shot dead a

hundred yards from the square. But a leader no less heroic was at

hand. Instantly Captain Von Uslar Gleichen, in charge of the left

troop, dashed to the front. He rode out to the head of the squadron,

inciting his men by voice and gesture and example. Another French

volley smote hard on the squadron, but the intrepid troopers galloped

through it, and, bringing up their right flank, swept on towards the

enemy’s bayonets, making to attack the square on two sides. The two

foremost ranks of the French were on the knee with bayonets to the

front, presenting a deadly double row of steel. In rear the steady

muskets of four standing ranks were levelled at the horsemen. The

dragoons pressed on close up, and some were trying, in vain, to beat

aside the bayonets before them, and make a gap through, when an

accident at the critical moment gave the opportunity. A shot from the

kneeling ranks, apparently fired unintentionally, as it is said, killed

a horse, and caused it with its rider to fall forward, right across

and on top of the bayonets. Thus a lane was unexpectedly laid open to

the cavalry. They seized the chance instantly and crowded in through.

The square was broken. It was cleft apart: its ranks were scattered

and dispersed. All was over in a few moments. Within three minutes the

entire battalion had been either cut down under the slaughtering swords

of the dragoons or had been made prisoners.

Immediately on that another Hanoverian captain, Von Reitzenstein, came

sweeping by with the second squadron, riding for the second French

square. These met the charge with a bold front and rapid volley, but

their \_moral\_ had been shaken by the startling and horrible scene

they had just beheld. The front face of the second square gave way as

the horsemen got close, and four-fifths of that battalion were either

sabred on the spot or made prisoners.

There was yet, near by, the third battalion in its square. Its numbers

had been added to by such fugitive survivors from the first and second

squares as had been able to reach the place and get inside. The third

squadron of the Dragoons dealt with the third square in the same way,

riding boldly at it, and breaking in with deadly results, as before.

How the Eagle of the 105th was saved--it was with the first battalion

in the square first broken--is not on record. It did, however, somehow,

evade capture--hidden hastily perhaps beneath the coat of somebody

in the handful of men who got away in the \_mêlée\_. Only the broken

Eagle-pole was left, to be picked up among the dead after the fight:

Described a British officer who went over the ground after the fight:

“The contest ended in a dreadful massacre of the French infantry. The

105th bravely stood their ground, but the ponderous weight of the heavy

cavalry broke down all resistance; and arms lopped off, heads cloven

to the spine, or gashes across the breast and shoulders showed the

fearful encounter that had taken place.”

[Sidenote: SPOILS TAKEN IN ANOTHER WAY]

The third of the trophy Eagles paraded in London before the Prince

Regent was that of Napoleon’s 39th of the Line. It had been picked up

in the dried-up bed of the river Ceira, one of the tributaries of the

Douro. Apparently the Eagle had been dropped, owing to the fall of its

bearer during the night action of Foz d’Aronce on June 15, 1811, when

Ney’s corps of Masséna’s army, then retreating from Torres Vedras, was

roughly handled and driven across the river by Wellington’s Third and

Light Divisions.

The fourth and fifth of the Eagles were found at Madrid on Wellington’s

occupation of the city after Salamanca--stored away in the French

arsenal and army dépôt there, to which uses the ancient Royal

Palace of the Buen Retiro, just outside the walls of Madrid, had

been converted.[28] Seventeen hundred men held the Retiro, and the

approaches to the arsenal had been fortified by order of Napoleon, but

the garrison surrendered without firing a shot. They gave up to the

victors 180 brass cannon, 900 barrels of powder, 20,000 stand of arms,

muskets and bayonets, together with the Eagles of the 13th and 51st of

the Line, which had been laid up at the Retiro for safe custody while

the two regiments were operating in a wild part of the country against

the Spanish guerrillas.[29]

The last Eagles taken by Wellington in the Peninsular War came into our

hands in the battles of the Pyrenees.[30] Neither of them is now in

existence. One was taken by our 28th in the combat of the Pass of Maya.

The 28th, supporting the 92nd Highlanders in the fighting, overwhelmed

with a series of fierce volleys an unfortunate French regiment, which

was afterwards discovered to be the French 28th--a curious coincidence.

The Eagle of the 28th, the senior corps of its brigade, was found on

the battlefield, and was brought to England and hung in the Chapel

Royal, Whitehall. It disappeared from there in circumstances already

related. The second French Eagle was that of the 52nd of the Line,

presented by Wellington, as has been told, to the Spanish Cortes. That

also has since been entirely lost sight of.

[Sidenote: NAPOLEON’S ORDER OF RECALL]

This also may be added. Early in 1813 a special order was issued by

Napoleon to the army in Spain requiring the Eagles of most of the

regiments to be sent back to France. Napoleon at that time was in

Paris, engaged in getting together a new Grand Army to replace that

destroyed in Russia. The regiments in Spain, he said, would be so

weakened by the intended withdrawal of their third, fourth, and fifth

battalions (which he was recalling in order to send them to Germany for

the coming campaign there), that the Eagles--in charge of the first

battalions which were remaining in Spain--would be exposed to undue

risk. “In future,” he wrote, “there will in Spain be only one Eagle to

each brigade, that of the senior regiment of the brigade.” The Eagles

withdrawn from Spain, added the order, would “in the end rejoin the

battalions with the Grand Army in Germany, as soon as these had been

reconstituted afresh as regiments, with a sufficient force of men to

ensure the safety of the Eagles.” All the cavalry Eagles were recalled:

“No regiment of Cavalry in Spain is to retain its Eagle. Those who have

not done so are immediately to send theirs to the dépôt.”

It was due to this order mainly that at Vittoria, after the

overwhelming rout of the French army, only one Eagle-pole--with its

Eagle gone--fell into British hands, although there had been on the

field upwards of 70,000 French soldiers (of whom 55,000 were infantry),

and the French lost everything--in the words of one of their own

generals (Gazan), “all their equipages, all their guns, all their

treasure, all their stores, all their papers.”[31]

CHAPTER X

IN THE HOUR OF DARKEST DISASTER

AFTER MOSCOW: HOW THE EAGLES FACED THEIR FATE

There are seventy-five standards of Napoleon’s Grand Army of 1812 now

in Russia, trophies of the Moscow disaster. Rather more than half of

the number are Eagles. The remainder of the trophies are battalion and

cavalry flags; some French, some the ensigns of allied contingents and

the troops of vassal states of the Napoleonic Empire, compelled to

take a part in the campaign. All the European armies of the period are

represented among the trophies: green and white Saxon flags; blue and

white Bavarian flags; violet and white Polish ensigns; Spanish, Dutch,

and Portuguese colours; Swiss flags; Westphalian and Baden flags of the

Confederation of the Rhine; the red and black of Würtemburg; the yellow

and black of Austria; the white and black of Prussia; the green, white,

and red tricolor of Italy.

They are preserved at St. Petersburg, in the Kazan Cathedral and in the

Cathedral of St. Peter and St. Paul. Those in the Kazan Cathedral are

grouped over and round the tomb of the septuagenarian hero, Kutusoff,

who lies buried on the spot where he knelt in prayer before setting

out to take command as generalissimo of the national army. Near by,

suspended against the pillars, are the marshal’s bâton of Davout, and

the keys of Hamburg, Leipsic, Dresden, Rheims, Breda, and Utrecht,

similarly spoils of the Napoleonic war.[32]

[Sidenote: MOST OF THE EAGLES GOT THROUGH]

The actual Eagle trophies number all told between forty and fifty: less

than a third of the total array of Eagles that crossed the Niemen at

the head of their regiments on the outbreak of the war. The majority

of the Eagles of the Grand Army were saved from falling into the hands

of the Russians through the devoted heroism of those responsible for

their safe-keeping amid the horrors of the retreat. Of those at St.

Petersburg, not more than half at most were taken in actual combat,

and they were only yielded up by their bearers with life, being

picked up from among the dead bodies, and carried off by the Russians

on going over the field after the fight was over. Five Eagles only

were surrendered by capitulation. The others were brought in by the

Cossacks, who came upon them while prowling in rear of the retreating

army. They were found, some in hollow trees, where their despairing

bearers had tried to conceal them; some in holes dug with bayonets in

the frozen ground underneath the snow. Others were dragged to light,

broken from their staves, from beneath the coats or from the knapsacks

of officers and men, who had fallen by the way at night and been

frozen to death, during the final stage of the retreat between Wilna

and the Niemen. It is in remembrance of how, to the last, during the

Moscow retreat, in many a dark and hopeless hour, there yet remained

detachments of devoted men, the last remnants of regiments, at all

times ready to stand at bay and sacrifice themselves for the honour of

their Eagles, amidst hordes of disorganised fugitives all round--in

remembrance of that, the army of modern France commemorates on the

colours of certain regiments, as representing corps that bore the same

numbers in Napoleon’s Grand Army in Russia, the names, among others, of

“Marojaroslav,” “Polotz,” “Wiasma,” “Krasnoi,” “La Berezène,” defeats

and disasters though these were.

[Sidenote: WHAT FRANCE REMEMBERS TO-DAY]

The Eagles were under fire for the first time in Russia on July 17,

in the attack on Smolensk on the Dnieper, the ancient Lithuanian

capital, where took place the first important battle of the war. There

the Eagles of Ney’s and Davout’s corps did their part in inciting

the men to add fresh laurels to the fame of their regiments; ever

prominent in the attack, leading charge after charge as the columns

made repeated efforts to storm the fortified suburbs and lofty ramparts

of the citadel. The soldiers did all that intrepidity and desperate

valour might attempt, but in vain. No valour could prevail against

the stubborn endurance of the Russians, who also occupied a strongly

walled position that was practically impregnable. The fierce contest

went on all through a whole day, until nightfall, and then, under cover

of darkness, the defenders silently drew off and retreated beyond the

city, leaving Smolensk in flames. No fewer than 15,000 French and

10,000 Russians fell in the merciless encounter.

Next morning there followed a spectacle hardly ever perhaps paralleled:

the march of the Grand Army through the streets between the still

blazing houses, “the martial columns advancing in the finest order to

the sound of military music.” “We traversed between furnaces,” as an

officer puts it, “tramping over the hot and smouldering ashes, in all

the pomp of military splendour, bands playing and each Eagle leading

its men.”

[Sidenote: WON ON THE BATTLEFIELD]

At Smolensk one regiment won its Eagle, which Napoleon presented at

five o’clock in the morning on July 19, before the paraded battalions

of Davout’s corps. It was the 127th of the Line; a regiment, it is

curious to note, enrolled a few months before, from former Hanoverian

subjects of our own King George the Third, and commanded by French

officers as a regular corps of the French Line. By Napoleon’s latest

ordinance, issued just before the Emperor quitted Paris in May,

the regiments newly raised for the Russian War, of which there were

several, were in each case to win their Eagles on the battlefield. The

Eagle for each regiment was to be provided in advance, but would be

held back, locked up in the regimental chest, until it “should be won

by distinguished conduct.” The 127th won their Eagle at Smolensk, their

brilliant service being specially brought before Napoleon by Marshal

Davout, who, of his own initiative, claimed the Eagle for them from

Napoleon. The regiment bore it with distinction through the hottest of

the fighting at Borodino, carried it all through the disastrous retreat

from Moscow, and preserved it to the end to go through the later

campaign in Germany, and face the enemy after that in the last stand

before Paris in 1814. The Eagle was eventually destroyed by order of

the restored Bourbon Government.

The second great battle-day of the Eagles in the Russian War was

at Borodino, on September 7. There a quarter of a million and more

combatants faced each other: on one side, 132,000 Russians with 640

guns; on the other, 133,000 French with 590 guns. The battle of

Borodino was perhaps the most sanguinary and the most obstinately

contested in history. The opening shots were fired at sunrise. When at

sunset both sides drew sullenly apart, exhausted after twelve hours of

carnage, neither army was victorious. Each held the ground on which it

had begun the battle; 25,000 men lay dead on the field, and 68,000 more

lay wounded, an appalling massacre that staggered even Napoleon.

Amidst the ferocious savagery of the hand-to-hand fighting that

characterised Borodino all over the field, many of the Eagles were

in desperate peril. Several were cut off in the terrible havoc that

the ferocious Russian counter-charges wrought in the French ranks,

and were only saved by the stern fortitude of the soldiers, fighting

at times back to back round the Eagles, keeping off the enemy with

bayonet thrusts till help should come. In one part of the field the

9th of the Line was isolated and for a time broken up and scattered.

The Eagle-bearer was cut off by himself and surrounded. He saved the

Eagle, as he fell wounded. “Amidst the confusion, wounded by two

bayonet thrusts, I fell, but I was able to make an effort to prevent

the Eagle falling into the hands of the enemy. Some of them rushed at

me and closed round, but, getting to my feet, I managed to fling the

Eagle, staff and all, over their heads towards some of our men, whom I

had caught sight of, fortunately near by, trying to charge through and

rescue the Eagle. This was all I could do before I fell again and was

made prisoner.” The brave fellow returned to France two years later,

at the Peace of 1814, and made his way to the regimental dépôt, where

he found barely twenty of his comrades at Borodino left. The rest had

succumbed during the retreat from Moscow. The survivors had brought

back the Eagle to France; only, however, to have to give it up to the

new Minister of War for destruction.

[Sidenote: TWO EAGLES JUST SAVED]

The 18th of the Line, broken in a Russian counter-attack, after

storming one of the Russian redoubts erected to defend part of the

position, rallied with their Eagle in their midst and held their ground

in spite of repeated attacks until help could get through to them. At

the roll-call next morning, 40 officers out of 50, and 800 men out of

2,000 were reported as missing; left dead or wounded on the field.

Another regiment lost its colonel and half one battalion dead on the

field; the Eagle-Guard were all shot down or bayoneted round the Eagle,

which in the end was saved and brought out of the battle by a corporal,

who was awarded a commission by Napoleon in the presence of the remains

of the regiment next day. The Eagle of the 61st of the Line again

was only kept out of Russian hands by the devotion of the men round

it. Napoleon rode past the regiment next day while being paraded for

the roll to be called. Only two battalions were there, and he asked

the colonel where the third battalion was. “It is in the redoubt,

Sire!” was the officer’s reply, pointing in the direction of the Great

Redoubt, round which some of the hardest fighting of the day had taken

place. The battalion had literally been annihilated: not an officer or

a man of the 1,100 in the third battalion of the 61st had returned from

the fight.

A regiment of Cuirassiers lost its Eagle at Borodino: the Eagle had

disappeared in the midst of a fierce \_mêlée\_, in which the Eagle-bearer

had gone down. The loss was not discovered till later. All, however,

refused to believe that it had been captured: that was incredible.

The dead Eagle-bearer’s body was found after the battle, but no Eagle

was there. Overwhelmed with shame, the regiment had to admit that the

impossible had happened, and during the weeks that they were at Moscow

“they remained plunged in a profound dolour.” The Eagle reappeared in

an extraordinary way. In the retreat, when passing the scene of the

battle, a ghastly and horrible spectacle with its unburied corpses

and the carcasses of horses strewn thickly and heaped up all over the

field, a sudden thought struck one of the officers. Late that night,

he and a brother officer, taking the risk of capture by Cossacks on

the prowl in rear of the retreating army, rode back and found their

way by moonlight to where the Cuirassiers had had their fight and the

Eagle-bearer had fallen. They found the Eagle inside the carcass of

the Eagle-bearer’s horse. It had been thrust in there by the dying

Eagle-bearer through the gaping wound that had killed the horse, as the

only means to conceal it in the midst of the enemy.

[Sidenote: HOW THE EAGLES ENTERED MOSCOW]

The Eagles made their last triumphant entry into a conquered capital

at Moscow on September 14, the Eagle of the Old Guard leading the

way at the head of the grenadiers of the Guard, all wearing for the

day their full-dress parade uniform. As has been said, every officer

and soldier of the Guard, by Napoleon’s standing order, carried a

suit of full-dress uniform in his kit or knapsack on campaign in

readiness for such occasions--“en tenue de parade comme si elle eut

défiler au Carrousel.” They had marched like that with music and

full military pomp twice through Vienna, and through the streets of

Berlin and Madrid; but there was at Moscow a disconcerting and ominous

difference, both in their surroundings and in the reception that they

met. Elsewhere, alike in Vienna, Berlin, and Madrid, the parade march

of the victorious Eagles passed through densely crowded streets of

onlookers, silently gazing with dejected mien at the scene. At Moscow

not a soul was in the streets, at the windows, anywhere; on every side

were emptiness and desolation. The inhabitants had fled the city, and

only deserted houses remained. The first incendiary fires at Moscow

broke out at midnight, within twelve hours of Napoleon taking up his

residence in the Kremlin.

The spell after that was broken. Henceforward victory deserted the

Eagles; the hour of fate was at hand for Napoleon and the Grand Army.

The Fortune of War, indeed, turned against the Eagles even before

Napoleon had quitted Moscow.

Early on October 18, Napoleon, while at breakfast in the Kremlin,

suddenly heard distant cannonading away to the south. He learned

what had happened that afternoon while holding a review of the

Italian Royal Guard. “We hastily regained our quarters, packed up our

parade-uniforms, put on our service kit ... and to the sound of our

drums and bands threaded our way through the streets of Moscow at five

in the afternoon.” During the past five weeks, while all had been

outwardly quiet, the Russian armies had been manœvring to close in

along the only road of retreat open to Napoleon.

[Sidenote: THE FIRST SENT TO THE CZAR]

The nearest of the Russian armies, concentrated to the south-west of

Moscow, struck the first blow on October 18 at daybreak, by surprising

Murat’s cavalry camp near Vinkovo. The results to the French were

disastrous. Two thousand of Murat’s men were killed and as many

more were taken prisoners. Between thirty and forty guns were lost,

and Murat’s personal camp-baggage train, which included “his silver

canteens and cooking utensils, in which cats’ and horse flesh were

found prepared for food”--a discovery that opened the eyes of the

Russians to the precarious position of affairs in Napoleon’s army.

Murat himself, according to one story, “rode off on the first alarm in

his shirt.” He only got away, according to another, by cutting his way

through the Russians sword in hand, at the head of his personal escort

of carabineers. Two Eagles were spoils of the surprise; the first to

fall into Russian hands in the war. They were lost in the general

scrimmage, their bearers being sabred at the outset of the Russian

onslaught. The Eagles were at once sent off to St. Petersburg to be

presented to the Czar Alexander.

On the other hand nine Eagles were saved, their escorts fighting their

way successfully through the Russians.

Many stories are recorded in memoirs of survivors of the Grand Army of

heroic endeavours made repeatedly by officers and men to save their

Eagles from the enemy amid the disasters and horrors of the retreat.

Their devotion and self-sacrifice had their reward in the preservation

of seven Eagles in every ten.

Two Eagles were lost fourteen days after leaving Moscow, in the

disastrous battle at Wiasma on November 2, halfway on the road back to

Smolensk, where the advanced columns of the pursuing Russians attacked

and all but cut the retreating French army in two. The rearguard of

the Grand Army, Marshal Davout’s corps, with the Italian corps of the

Viceroy Eugène Beauharnais, was overpowered and driven in and broken

up; crushed under the overpowering artillery fire of the Russians. They

left behind 6,000 dead, 2,000 prisoners, and 27 guns. Two Eagles were

taken, their regiments being virtually annihilated, but twenty-one

were saved. They were safeguarded through the rout by groups of

brave-hearted officers and men, who beat off the rushes made at them

by the Russian cavalry and the Cossacks. They fought their way through

until they met Ney’s troops, who had heard the firing and turned back,

arriving in time to stem and check the Russian pursuit and enable

what was left of the two shattered army corps to rally under their

protection.

[Sidenote: “WE HAVE DONE OUR DUTY!”]

One infantry regiment at Wiasma perished on the battlefield to a man,

but saved its Eagle. It was the rearmost of all, and was isolated and

surrounded beyond reach of help. In vain its men formed square and

tried to fight their way after the rest through the surging masses of

the Russians. They made their way for a time until the enemy brought

up artillery. A Russian battery galloped up, unlimbered close to them,

and opened fire with murderous effect. The Frenchmen tried desperately

to charge the guns, but were beaten back by a rush of cavalry. At last,

in despair, they formed square and faced the cruel slaughter that the

guns made in their ranks, in the hope that help might reach them. Terms

were offered them and refused. They would not surrender, and fought on

till dusk, when their ammunition gave out. The Russians were closing

round for a final decisive charge on the small handful of survivors,

when the wounded colonel, seeing all was over, made the attempt that

saved the Eagle. The scanty remnant of what had that morning been a

regiment of 3,000 men formed round in a ring, facing towards the enemy

with bayonets levelled. The Eagle-staff was broken up and the fragments

thrust under the ground. With flint and steel a match was lighted and

the silken tricolor consumed. The Eagle was then tied up in a havresac

and entrusted to an old soldier who was known to be a good rider. The

colonel, giving up his own charger to the man, bade him watch his

chance and, as the enemy came on in the dark, dash through them and

ride his hardest. “Carry the Eagle to his Majesty,” were the colonel’s

words. “Deliver it to him, and tell him that we have done our duty!”

The man rode off. He was able to get through the nearest Russians under

cover of the darkness, having to fight his way before he got clear, and

receiving several wounds. Then his horse fell dead from its injuries.

On foot he stumbled on, and before midnight reached, not Napoleon, but

Marshal Ney, to whom he gave up his precious charge. No officer or man

of the others of the luckless regiment was ever heard of in France

again. No prisoners from it ever returned--only the Eagle survived.

Three days after Wiasma the Russian winter suddenly set in on the

doomed host. It brought about at once the disintegration and

disorganisation of the Grand Army. Already, demoralised by their

privation, hundreds of men had fallen out of the ranks, flinging away

their muskets and knapsacks, and straggling along in disorderly groups.

A third practically of the Army ceased to exist as a fighting force

within the first fortnight of the retreat, before the first snows fell.

The others, though, still kept to their duty. Marching in the ranks day

after day, they strove their hardest to beat back the incessant attacks

of the swarms of Cossacks, hovering round on the watch to raid the

baggage-convoys at every block or stoppage on the road. With the coming

of the snow the doom of the Grand Army was sealed. It was impossible to

maintain discipline with the thermometer at twenty degrees below zero.

Men dropped dead from cold by the score every half-mile.

On November 6 the sun disappeared; a grey fog enshrouded everything;

the frost set in; and a bitter north wind in howling gusts swept over

the face of the land; with it came down the snow, falling hour after

hour by day and night without ceasing.

“From that day the Army lost its courage and its military instinct. The

soldier no longer obeyed his officer. The officer separated himself

from his general. The disbanded regiments marched in disorder. In

their frantic search for food they spread themselves over the plain,

pillaging and destroying whatever fell in their way.” So a survivor

wrote.

The snow came down “in large broad flakes, which at once chilled and

blinded the soldiers: the marchers, however, stumbled forward, men

often struggling and at last sinking in holes and ravines that were

concealed from them by the new and disguised appearance of the country.

Those who yet retained discipline and kept their ranks stood some

chance of receiving assistance; but amid the mass of stragglers, the

men’s hearts, intent only on self-preservation, became hardened and

closed against every feeling of sympathy and compassion. The storm-wind

lifted the snow from the earth, as well as that steadily pelting down

from above, into dizzy eddies round the soldiers. Many were hurled to

the ground in this manner, while the same snow furnished them with an

instant grave, under which they were concealed until the next summer

came, to display their ghastly remains in the open air.”

[Sidenote: WHEN THE COSSACKS GOT TO WORK]

The Cossacks redoubled their attacks on the retreating army after

Wiasma. They had harassed the French incessantly from the day after

Napoleon passed Mojaisk, but after Wiasma their audacity increased a

hundredfold. They captured prisoners hourly, from among the stragglers

mostly; in droves, by fifties and hundreds at a time. Day after day

they hung on the flanks, swooping down with loud shouts on the

unfortunate wretches, rounding them up like sheep, and driving them

before them towards their own camps at the points of their long lances.

Many they killed on the spot, or stripped naked to perish in the snow.

Others they drove along to the nearest camp of Kutusoff’s regulars for

the sake of the money reward offered for prisoners brought in alive.

Others again, to save themselves the trouble of driving them all the

way to the army camp, they handed over to peasants in the villages,

selling them at a rouble a head, for the peasants to make sport of

and maltreat or kill. The brutalities and ruthless devastations that

the French army had committed in its advance to Moscow had infuriated

the Russian peasantry. Intent on vengeance they now made use of their

opportunity to the full. They burned alive some of their captives, by

tossing them into pits half filled with blazing pine-logs. Seventy

were done to death in this horrible way in one village. Others they

buried up to their necks in the ground and left to die; or else tied

them to trees for the wolves to tear to pieces.[33] Others they clubbed

or flogged to death, tying down the wretched Frenchmen to logs on

the ground, hounding on the women and children to hammer their heads

to pieces with thick sticks. A common method of Cossacks and peasants

alike for making prisoners was to light great watch-fires at night,

a little way off from the retreating column, and as the frozen and

starving stragglers came crowding up to the blaze they surrounded them

and carried them off wholesale.

After the snow set in, guns and baggage-wagons were abandoned to the

Cossacks at almost every hundred yards. It was impossible for the

weakened and dying horses to drag them along; even to keep their

footing on the frozen ground. Within the first week after Wiasma the

appalling number of 30,000 horses either died of starvation, there

being no way of getting fodder for them because of the snow, or were

frozen to death.

[Sidenote: THE EAGLES OF NEY’S CORPS]

In spite of everything, some of the regiments still kept together and

marched in military formation, with their Eagles at their head; those

in particular of Marshal Ney’s corps. They formed the rearguard and

chief protection to the army from Wiasma onwards; held together by the

heroic example and personality of their indefatigable leader, ever

present where there was fighting, ever calm and confident, and ready

with words of encouragement. Not an Eagle was lost along the line of

march between Moscow and Smolensk by Ney’s men; rallying round them to

beat off the Cossack attacks time and again with the cry, “Aux Aigles!

Voici les Cosaques!”

This incident, not unlike the cuirassier ride to recover the Eagle left

on the field at Borodino, is said to have taken place between Wiasma

and Smolensk. One regiment of Ney’s cavalry missed its Eagle after a

sharp fight on the road, the Eagle-bearer having apparently fallen

during the encounter, unseen by the survivors. That night round the

bivouac fire lots were drawn, and two officers rode back amid blinding

snow squalls to try to find the Eagle. They successfully evaded the

Cossacks and made their way ten miles back to the scene of the combat,

where, after scaring off some wolves, they searched in the snow and

found the dead officer’s body with the Eagle by its side. They brought

it back safely to the regiment and restored it to their comrades. Their

limbs were frost-bitten and rigid from cold, so that they had to be

lifted off their horses, but the brave men were content--they had saved

their Eagle.

[Illustration:

\_Photo Alinari.\_

MARSHAL NEY WITH THE REARGUARD IN THE RETREAT FROM MOSCOW.

From a picture by A. Ivon, at Versailles.]

[Sidenote: SO FAR TEN EAGLES LOST]

At Krasnoi, on November 19, between Smolensk and the Beresina, Napoleon

underwent another severe defeat from the pursuing Russians, 10,000

prisoners and 70 guns falling into the victors’ hands. Two Eagles were

carried off from the battlefield and despatched to St. Petersburg

by special courier, together with Kutusoff’s report to the Czar.

Twenty-seven Eagles, however, got past the Russians, fighting their

way through, thanks to the endurance of brave men who rallied round

them. Krasnoi it was that gave the death-blow to Napoleon’s last hope

of rallying the Grand Army. After it less than 30,000 men remained

under arms with the main column, including the 8,000 survivors of the

Imperial Guard. Up to then, according to the Russian official returns,

80,000 prisoners, 500 guns, and “40 standards and flags of all kinds”

had fallen into the hands of the pursuers. Not more than ten, however,

of the forty standards taken were Eagles: the two taken at Murat’s

surprise at Vinkovo; the two taken at Wiasma; the two taken at Krasnoi;

also two taken before Napoleon reached Smolensk, from a brigade sent

from Smolensk to help him on the road, which blundered into the middle

of the Russian army and had to surrender; and two captured elsewhere,

from the French flanking armies of Marshal Macdonald and Marshal St.

Cyr. An eleventh Eagle was taken in the second battle at Krasnoi,

from Ney’s rearguard; the only Eagle that Ney actually lost in fight

throughout the 600 miles’ march between Moscow and the frontier.

At Krasnoi, Ney’s rearguard, following at a day’s march behind the

rest of the army, found its way barred. The Russians, after defeating

Napoleon’s main column, a day’s march in advance, had waited on the

scene of the former fighting for Ney. They held a position that it was

practically impossible for Ney’s comparatively small force to get past.

After vainly attempting to break through, Ney had to draw back, and

make a forlorn-hope effort to avoid destruction by a long détour, in

the course of which he had to abandon guns, baggage, and horses, and

cross the Dnieper on ice hardly thick enough to bear the weight of a

man.

On the eve of Krasnoi, indeed, the rearguard found itself in so

desperate a position, that Ney ordered all its Eagles to be destroyed.

His regiments had suffered so severely in their continuous fighting,

that it was impossible adequately to safeguard the Eagles. Every

musket and bayonet was wanted in the fighting line. It was impossible

to supply sufficient Eagle-escorts. So far, in spite of the dreadful

straits to which some of the regiments had been reduced, all had

marched openly with their Eagles, and fought round them, guarding them

sedulously by night and day. “When excess of fatigue constrained us to

take a few moments of repose,” describes Colonel De Fesenzac of the 4th

of the Line, “we (what was left of the regiment able to carry arms--not

100 men) assembled together in any place where we could find shelter,

a few of the men standing by to mount guard for the protection of the

regimental Eagle.”

“Then,” describes the colonel, “came the order that all the Eagles

should be broken up and buried. As I could not make up my mind to

this, I directed that the staff should be burned, and that the Eagle

of the 4th Regiment should be stowed in the knapsack of one of the

Eagle-bearers, by whose side I kept my post on the march.” The Eagle

of the 4th, it may be added by the way, was the identical Eagle that

Napoleon had presented to the regiment in place of that lost at

Austerlitz, in exchange for, as has been told, two captured Austrian

flags.

[Sidenote: “THEY OUGHT TO PERISH WITH US”]

Other officers did the same as Colonel De Fesenzac. One officer,

however, the colonel of the 18th of the Line, flatly refused to have

his regimental Eagle either broken up or hidden away. “The Eagle,” he

says in his journal, which still exists, “had throughout, until then,

been carried at the head of the regiment, and I declined to obey the

order on behalf of the 18th. It seemed to us a monstrous ignominy. Our

Eagles were not given us to be made away with or hidden: they ought to

perish with us.” The Eagle of the 18th did actually perish with the

regiment. In the rearguard repulse at Krasnoi the entire regiment was

destroyed, except for some twenty survivors, including the colonel,

severely wounded. “Our Eagle,” says the gallant colonel, proudly

recording its fate, “remained among our dead on the field of battle.”

That Eagle of the 18th was the only one of Marshal Ney’s Eagles to

fall into the hands of the Russians in battle. Some ten of the Eagles

now at St. Petersburg were found on the bodies of officers and men who

had been either frozen to death or had fallen dead on the march during

Ney’s retreat after Krasnoi; they were not taken in fight.

Ney rejoined Napoleon with only 1,500 men left out of 12,000, of which

the rearguard had consisted when it left Smolensk. It was while making

his last effort to get past the Russians after his attempt to break

through at Krasnoi had failed, that Ney, overtaken on the banks of

the half-frozen Dnieper on the evening before he risked his perilous

crossing, and summoned by the Russians to surrender, made that proudly

defiant reply which has ever since been a treasured memory to the

French Army: “A Marshal of France never surrenders!” Six hours later

he had evaded capture and, with the remnant of his corps, was across

the river. All the world has heard how Napoleon, hopeless of seeing him

again, welcomed Ney with the words: “I have three hundred millions of

francs in the vaults of the Tuileries; I would have given them all for

Marshal Ney!”

[Sidenote: ALL KEPT TOGETHER FOR SAFETY]

The remaining Eagles had by now been assembled for preservation under

the protection of what troops of the main column, which Napoleon

accompanied, still continued under arms. Further effort to rally the

shattered host was beyond possibility. Only portions of the two army

corps of Marshals Victor and Oudinot, called in from holding the line

of communications, still retained military formation, together with

the reduced battalions of the Old Guard which had kept near Napoleon

throughout. To save the remaining Eagles, the officers of broken-up and

disbanded regiments, with some devoted soldiers who stood by them, took

personal charge of the Eagles, and carried them with their own hands.

Banding together and marching in company side by side, they tramped on,

plodding through the snow day and night for 200 miles; the collected

Eagles all massed in the centre. They attached themselves to the column

of the Old Guard, and kept their way close by Napoleon.

A survivor of the retreat from Moscow, in his memoirs, describes how he

saw Napoleon and the Eagles pass by him on the way to the Beresina on

the morning of November 25:

“Those in advance seemed to be generals, a few on horseback, but the

greater part on foot. There was also a great number of other officers,

the remnant of the Doomed Squadron and Battalion, formed on the 22nd

and barely existing at the end of three days. Those on foot dragged

themselves painfully along, almost all of them having their feet frozen

and wrapped in rags or in bits of sheep’s-skin, and all nearly dying of

hunger. Afterwards came the small remains of the Cavalry of the Guard.

The Emperor came next, on foot, and carrying a staff. He wore a large

cloak lined with fur, and had a red velvet cap with black-fox fur on

his head. Murat walked on foot at his right, and on his left the Prince

Eugène, Viceroy of Italy. Next came the Marshals Berthier--Prince of

Neufchatel--Ney, Mortier, Lefebvre, with other marshals and generals

whose corps had been annihilated.

“The Emperor mounted a horse as soon as he had passed; so did a few of

those with him: the greater part of them had no horses to ride. Seven

or eight hundred officers and non-commissioned officers followed,

walking in order and perfect silence, and carrying the Eagles of their

different regiments, which had so often led them to victory. This was

all that remained of 60,000 men.

“After them came the Imperial Guard on foot, marching also in order.”

Four Eagles were lost in the fighting at the passage of the

Beresina, where a whole division of Marshal Victor’s corps (General

Partonneaux’s) was cut off and compelled to surrender. On the last

night, when either massacre under the Russian guns or laying down their

arms was all that was left to them, they broke up and buried their

Eagles in the ground underneath the snow. The officers of one regiment,

it is told, broke up their Eagle before burying it, burned the flag

at their last bivouac fire, mixed the ashes with thawed snow, and

swallowed the concoction.

[Illustration: NAPOLEON AND THE “SACRED SQUADRON” ON THE WAY TO THE

BERESINA.

From the picture by H. Bellangé.]

[Sidenote: WHEN THE LAST HOPE WAS GONE]

The little column of officers with their Eagles passed the Beresina

with the Guard, and thus escaped that last catastrophe, the crowning

horror of the bridge disaster, when 24,000 ill-fated human beings were

sent to their account; either killed in the fighting with the Russians,

or drowned in the river, jammed together on the burning bridge, while

the Russian guns from the rear thundered on them with shot and shell.

The officer-escort with the Eagles tramped on until Wilna was reached;

until after Napoleon had left the army and set off for Paris. Then,

on the final falling apart of the remnants of the stricken host,

the officers themselves dispersed, to escape as best they could

individually and get to the Niemen; breaking up the Eagle-poles and

concealing the Eagles and flags in knapsacks or under their uniforms.

The dispersal, says one officer, was at Napoleon’s own instance. “He

ordered all the officers who had no troops to make the best of their

way at once to the Niemen, considering that their services had best be

saved for the future army he was going to Paris to raise and organise.”

That is one story. According to another officer, utter despair at

their frightful position, abandoned by their chief, was the cause of

the break-up at Wilna and the final \_débâcle\_. “Until then a few armed

soldiers, led by their officers, had still rallied round the Eagles.

Now, however, the officers began to break away, and the soldiers became

fewer and fewer, and those left were finally reduced, of necessity,

some to conceal the Eagles in knapsacks, others to make away with

them.” Some of the officers fell dead on the way to the Niemen, struck

down suddenly by the cold, and their Eagles remained with them. Others

who died, with their last strength tried to put their charges beyond

reach of the enemy by scraping or digging holes in the frozen ground,

and burying the Eagles.[34]

[Sidenote: THE EAGLE OF THE OLD GUARD]

The Eagle of the Old Guard recrossed the Niemen at Kovno, while Ney

was making his final stand, defending the gate of the town; the

marshal fighting musket in hand at the last, with less than twenty

soldiers. That Eagle was still carried openly--the only one still so

displayed--carried defiantly aloft on its staff, borne to the last with

its escort in military formation, in the midst of the ranks of the 400

men of the Old Guard who were all that were able to reach the frontier.

AT BAY IN NORTHERN GERMANY--1813

There were yet dark days in store for the Eagles after the retreat from

Moscow was over. The tale of their misfortunes was not yet ended. There

was yet to be the sequel to the great catastrophe; further humiliations

in the War in Germany of 1813, and the Winter Campaign of 1814 in

Eastern France, which followed as the consequence and result of the

overthrow in Russia.

No fewer than fifteen of the Eagles that the devotion of their officers

brought through the retreat from Moscow are now--making allowance for

difficulties of identification, owing to defective records--among

the trophies of victory to be seen at Berlin and Potsdam, in Vienna,

and also at St. Petersburg. Those in Germany are mostly kept in the

Garrison Church of Potsdam, suspended triumphantly above the vault in

which lies the sarcophagus of Frederick the Great. They were placed

there of set purpose as an act of retribution, as a votive offering

to the \_manes\_ of the Great Frederick; as a Prussian rejoinder to

Napoleon’s act of wanton desecration after Jena. The four trophy Eagles

at Vienna are in the Imperial Arsenal Museum there. Two of them are the

spoils of Kulm; displayed together with the keys of Lyons, Langres,

Troyes, and the fortress of Mayence, which were surrendered during the

march of the Allies on Paris. The Russian trophy Eagles of 1813 are at

St. Petersburg, displayed with the Eagles which fell into Russian hands

in the retreat from Moscow.

What the annihilation of the Grand Army in Russia meant for Europe,

with what dramatic rapidity its import for the vassal states of

Napoleon was realised and turned to account, is a familiar story.

Prussia led the revolt at once, and all Northern Germany rose in arms

\_en masse\_ to commence the “War of Liberation,” joining hands with

Russia as the pursuing armies of the Czar crossed the frontier. Then

Austria, after negotiations rendered abortive at the last by Napoleon’s

infatuated pride and overweening self-confidence, threw her sword into

the balance and turned the scale decisively against France. Napoleon’s

hastily raised conscript levies, outnumbered and outmanœuvred, were

defeated on battlefield after battlefield, and driven in rout across

the Rhine to their final surrender at the gates of Paris; and then came

the abdication of Fontainebleau.

[Sidenote: THE EAGLES DIED HARD]

Yet, with all that, in those dark hours of their fate the Eagles died

hard. The trophy-collections of Berlin, Vienna, and St. Petersburg

testify to that. Only a percentage of the Eagles which faced their fate

on the battlefield became spoils to the victors. Marshal Macdonald’s

army, routed by Blücher on the Katzbach, thanks to the devotion of

the regimental officers and some of their men, saved all its Eagles

from the enemy except three. Ney’s army, no less roughly handled at

Dennewitz, managed to retain in like manner all its Eagles except

three. Vandamme’s army, annihilated and dispersed at Kulm, saved its

Eagles all but two. Oudinot was routed at Gross Beeren, with the

loss of guns and many prisoners; Gérard underwent the same fate near

Magdeburg; Bertrand was surprised and defeated with heavier losses

still; but not one Eagle was left as spoil of these disasters in the

hands of the victorious foe.

In one battle the Eagle of Napoleon’s Irish Legion was only just kept

from being to-day among the trophies displayed in the Garrison Church

of Potsdam over the tomb of Frederick the Great. It was immediately

after Macdonald’s defeat on the Katzbach. The Irish Legion was one

of the regiments in one of Macdonald’s divisions, that of General

Puthod. They had had a hard fight of it, and their retreat was barred

by the river Bober in flood. Under stress of the continuous attacks

of the Prussians in ever-increasing force, the 12,000 men of Puthod’s

Division had been reduced to barely 5,000. They had used up their

last cartridges, and had been driven back to the river-bank, where

the Prussian army closed in on them “in a half-moon.” The Prussians

halted for one moment until they realised that the troops before them

had no more ammunition. Then, aware that they had their foe at their

mercy, they rushed forward, cheering exultantly, to deliver the \_coup

de grâce\_. “All of a sudden,” describes an Irish officer, “30,000 men

ran forward on their prey, of whom none but those who knew how to swim

could attempt to escape.” The greater number of the French, all the

same, jumped into the river, and took the risk of drowning rather than

surrender. Less than five hundred got across the stream, and after

that they had to wade waist-deep for half a mile over flooded marshes

under a pitiless fire from the Prussian batteries. In the end only 150

men reached dry ground alive. Among the survivors were just 40 men of

the Irish Legion, with their Eagle--Colonel Ware, eight officers, the

Eagle-bearer, and thirty privates. The Irish remnant made their way

eventually to Dresden, and reported themselves to Napoleon.

[Sidenote: THE IRISH EAGLE’S FIRST ESCAPE]

That adventure, by the way, was the Irish Eagle’s second escape from

falling into an enemy’s hands since Napoleon presented it to the Legion

on the Field of Mars. On the first occasion it came within an ace of

being now among our British trophy Eagles at Chelsea; of, indeed,

being the first Napoleonic Eagle to be brought as spoil of war to

England. The Irish Legion was in garrison at Flushing in 1809, when the

fortress surrendered to the British Walcheren Expedition. On the night

before the final capitulation, Major Lawless of the Irish Legion took

charge of the Eagle, and in a rowing-boat made a risky passage among

the British ships of war in front of the batteries. He escaped up the

Scheldt to Antwerp, where he delivered the Eagle personally to Marshal

Bernadotte. Napoleon sent for the major to Paris, decorated him for

saving the Eagle, with the Cross of the Legion of Honour, and promoted

him lieutenant-colonel.

In the disaster on the Bober also, a soldier of the 134th of the Line

saved the Eagle of another regiment, the 147th. The two regiments, as

the Prussians charged down on them after their cartridges gave out, in

desperation rushed to meet their assailants with the bayonet. They were

overpowered and hurled back in confusion to the bank of the river, all

intermingled in the \_mêlée\_. The Eagle-bearer of the 147th fell dead,

shot down, and a Prussian officer made for the Eagle. A soldier of the

134th bayoneted the officer as he got to it, picked up the Eagle, and,

seeing only more Prussians round him, flung himself, still holding on

to the Eagle, into the river. The man could not swim, and was fired at

as he floundered in the water, but he was not hit. Unable to reach the

other side, he somehow got on to a shallow patch, and, still holding

fast to the Eagle, kept his footing there, until, to get away from

the hail of bullets all round him, he again risked drowning by trying

to drift downstream. He managed to keep his head above water, and got

over to a bed of rushes, fringing the farther bank. Creeping in there,

still holding on closely to the Eagle, the brave fellow hid for six

hours until dark, embedded in mud to his armpits most of the time.

After nightfall he worked his way through and crawled ashore. Finally,

after wandering across country for eight days, feeding on berries and

what he could pick up, in constant peril of discovery among the hostile

peasants and parties of Prussian dragoons scouring the district, the

heroic soldier at length found his way to Dresden. There he was brought

before Marshal Berthier, to whom he delivered the Eagle.

[Sidenote: AT THE COST OF HIS LIFE]

At the battle of the Katzbach the colonel of the 132nd of the Line

threw away his life under the mistaken impression that he saw the

Eagle of his regiment captured by the enemy. He was short-sighted, and

suddenly missed it in the middle of a charge. Thinking he saw the Eagle

being carried off by a party of Prussians he rode straight through

the enemy at them, to fall mortally wounded halfway, with his horse

shot beneath him. Some of the men saw the colonel fall, and charged

after him. They got to him and carried him off the field, and in the

retreat until a place of safety was reached, where the survivors of the

regiment had rallied. There the officers came round to bid farewell to

their dying chief. The Eagle-bearer of the regiment was among them,

and he, to the amazement of all, produced the Eagle from his havresac,

broken from its staff, and held it up before the eyes of the dying

colonel. No enemy’s hand, he declared, had contaminated it. Finding

himself and the Eagle, he explained, in imminent danger of capture, he

had wrenched the Eagle off the staff and hidden it--his act causing the

disappearance which the colonel had marked, and which had resulted in

his fatal dash among the enemy.

The 17th of the Line saved their Eagle and themselves after Vandamme’s

defeat at Kulm, and made their way to safety, as one of the officers

relates, after an extraordinary series of adventures. They had joined

Vandamme’s army at the beginning of the first day’s fighting--the

battle lasted three days--coming in after a week’s march from Dresden,

through pouring rain most of the time. They numbered four battalions,

4,000 men in all. Vandamme was successful on the first two days and

the 17th by themselves routed an Austrian regiment and captured a gun.

On the evening of the second day the French advanced again, driving

the enemy before them into the valley of Kulm. They bivouacked on the

ground they had won, anticipating a final triumph on the morrow. But

during that night two Russian and Prussian army corps reinforced the

Austrian columns unknown to the French.

One of the officers of the 17th, Major Fantin des Odoards, during the

night had his suspicions aroused about the enemy, and made a discovery;

but Vandamme would not listen to him.

He was unable to sleep, says Major Fantin, and, learning from a patrol

that mysterious sounds were being heard in the direction in which the

Austrians had retreated, he left the bivouac and went out alone beyond

the outposts, to creep in the dark towards the Austrian watch-fires.

At times, as he crawled forward, describes the major, he lay flat and

listened with his ear to the ground. In the end he felt certain that

he heard the tramp and stir of a vast number of men, and also the

rumble of artillery wheels moving across the front. Apparently, from

the direction the unseen troops were taking, they were marching to cut

off the retreat of the army from Dresden, Napoleon’s base of operations

throughout the campaign.

Major Fantin returned to the bivouac and went at once to report to the

general, finding him asleep. He aroused Vandamme and told what he had

heard and suspected; only, however, to be rebuffed and rudely answered

that he was quite mistaken. Vandamme, a surly and ill-conditioned boor

to deal with at all times, awoke in a vile temper. “You are a fool!”

was what he said in reply. “If the enemy are on the move at all, they

are in retreat, trying to escape me. To-morrow will see them flying, or

my prisoners.” With that Vandamme terminated the interview, and turned

over and went to sleep again.

[Sidenote: HEMMED IN ON EVERY SIDE]

He found out his mistake all too soon. Daylight disclosed dense swarms

of Austrians, Prussians, and Russians in front of Vandamme, on his

flanks, and closing on his rear; outnumbering him nearly four to one.

It was a desperate position, for the only road by which Vandamme

might retreat was held by the enemy. Little time was left to him to

deliberate what to do. He was in the act of forming up his columns in

a mass to try to fight his way through, when the enemy attacked in

overpowering force. Before noon that day, out of 30,000 men, 10,000 had

fallen. Seven thousand more were wounded or prisoners. The rest were

fugitives, flying for shelter and hiding-places in the woods round

the battlefield. All the French guns and baggage had been taken, and

Vandamme himself was a prisoner, together with many officers of rank.

The “annals of modern warfare record few instances of defeat more

complete than that of Vandamme at Kulm.”

The only regiment that kept its order was the 17th, and it before

the crisis had lost heavily. Its colonel and two of the \_chefs de

bataillon\_ had been killed; the two others were wounded. Only some

1,700 of the 4,000 men remained. It rested with Major Fantin, as senior

officer, to save those that were left and the Eagle.

The 17th were on the extreme right of the battle, where they had been

posted as support to Vandamme’s artillery. They held their ground as

long as possible, but the enemy closed in on them, overlapping them

on both flanks, and then stormed and captured the guns. The 17th were

isolated and in imminent peril--surrender or destruction were the only

alternatives before them.

[Sidenote: “EN HAUT L’AIGLE!”]

Looking round, the major, as he describes, marked a wooded hill some

little way off, and decided to make for that. There was just time

to get away before the enemy closed in on them. He sent off all

his tirailleurs, about 400 men, to skirmish and hold in check the

advancing Austrians. As they went off he shouted to the rest: “En haut

l’Aigle! Ralliement au drapeau!” (“Display the Eagle! All rally to the

standard!”) The men of the regiment formed round him quickly, and the

major pointed out the wooded hill to them with his sword. “All of you

disperse at once,” he told them, “and make your way there as quickly

as you can. You will find the Eagle of the regiment there, and me with

it!” The 17th broke up and scattered, and, under the protection of the

skirmishers, aided by the opportune mist which hung low over the ground

after the heavy rains of the past week, they made off in groups in

the direction pointed out. All just got past the enemy in time, Major

Fantin and two officers accompanying the Eagle.

An hour later, “\_nos débris\_,” as the major puts it, were straggling up

the hill, where they again rallied round the Eagle. The skirmishers,

cleverly withdrawn at the right moment, evaded the enemy also, and

most of them joined their comrades on the hill, where all silently

drew together. They then moved off, to halt for concealment in a

wooded glade behind. They stayed there, keeping quiet and lying down

beside their arms, for several hours; off the track of the pursuit,

and undiscovered by the enemy. “We were all very hungry and without

anything but what cartridges we had still left.”

At nightfall they moved away in the direction in which Dresden was

judged to be, without having a single map or anything to guide them.

They marched all night, mostly by a forest road, and keeping their

direction by means of occasional glimpses of the stars seen through

rifts in the cloudy sky overhead. More than once they had to halt

as the enemy were heard on the move not far off. They groped their

way forward with extreme caution, not a light being struck, and the

necessary words of command being spoken in an undertone, until after

midnight. Then they suddenly came into the open round a bend of the

road, and discovered, not half a mile off in front, the numerous

watch-fires of a large body of troops. “The column halted at the sight

like one man and stood in absolute silence. Who were those in front of

us? Friends or the enemy?”

Two scouts were sent forward to try to find out. They were away for

half an hour; an interval of intense suspense and anxiety to the

others. At the end of the time the two scouts came rushing back. They

brought unexpectedly good news. It was a French bivouac: that of the

14th Army Corps--Marshal St. Cyr’s. So the 17th and their Eagle were

saved.

Other Eagles that got away from the rout at Kulm and rejoined the army

owed their safety to the determination of small groups of officers and

men who cut their way through the enemy. “Officers fought with their

swords, privates with their bayonets and the butts of their muskets:

and as the struggle was to escape and not to destroy, a push and

wrestle, or a blow, which might suffice to throw the individual struck

out of the way of the striker, prevented in many instances the more

deadly thrust.” Finally, as the 17th had done, they found shelter among

the woods and ravines of the neighbourhood, and lay low there until the

enemy had moved off towards Töplitz, whereupon they made their way to

Dresden. The cavalry saved their Eagles by cutting their way through

the enemy. They suffered heavy losses, but succeeded in their effort.

Their commander, General Corbineau, “presented himself, wounded and

covered with blood, before Napoleon”; it was his arrival that announced

the disaster. The Eagles of the 33rd and the 106th of the Line taken at

Kulm are at Vienna.

[Sidenote: THE EAGLE-TROPHIES OF LEIPSIC]

The three days of battle at Leipsic, between October 16 and 19,

1813, cost Napoleon 60,000 men in killed, wounded, and prisoners,

and 300 guns; but not more than 6 Eagles were among the trophies of

battalion-flags and squadron-colours taken or found on the field, now

at Berlin, Vienna, and St. Petersburg.

One Eagle was lost during the first day’s fighting at Leipsic--taken

on the 16th by Blücher from Ney’s corps; but no others were lost until

the end. The 80,000 men who were able to make good their retreat with

Napoleon across the bridge over the Elster before it was prematurely

blown up, through a non-commissioned officer’s blunder, carried their

Eagles with them. What colour-trophies came into the possession of

the Allies were taken amid the final scenes of carnage; from cut-off

battalions of the three divisions left behind on the right bank of

the river, victims of the destruction of the bridge. They were mostly

captured in the ferocious hand-to-hand fighting which marked the

closing phase of the battle in the suburbs of Leipsic. The French

defended themselves there to the last with the courage of despair among

the fortified villas and loopholed garden walls. “Pressed upon by

superior numbers, and fighting, now in the streets, now in the houses,

now through gardens or other enclosures, the single end which they

could accomplish or which in point of fact they seemed to desire, was

that they might sell their lives at the dearest rate possible.” Two at

least of the Eagles now at Berlin were hastily buried in gardens during

the last stand, and were dug up there later when the ground was being

turned over.

[Sidenote: AMIDST THE ROUT AT LEIPSIC]

Forced to give back before their ever-increasing enemies, not a few

of the French “preferred death to captivity, and fought to the last.

These, retiring through by-lanes and covered passages, made their way

to the river, some where the ruins of the bridge covered its banks,

some above and others below that point, and, plunging into the deep

water, endeavoured to gain the opposite shore by swimming, an attempt

in which comparatively few succeeded.”

The three doomed divisions of Lauriston, Regnier, and Poniatowski, who

were cut off by the blowing up of the bridge, had, as it happened,

not many Eagles among them to lose. They were largely made up of

newly raised conscript regiments to whom Napoleon had not yet awarded

Eagles; regiments not yet entitled to carry Eagles, according to the

later regulations that Napoleon had laid down. Only four of the newly

raised regiments altogether, so far during the campaign in Germany,

had qualified for the honour. They had received their Eagles with the

customary ceremony at the hands of Napoleon: three of them on October

15, the day before the battle of Leipsic opened. The fourth had

received its Eagle at Dresden a month earlier. Two of these four Eagles

only were lost to the enemy at Leipsic.

The Eagle-bearers of four or five other regiments among those cut off

by the bridge disaster tried to swim across the Elster with their

Eagles. Their fate is unknown; probably they were drowned in the

attempt. Other Eagle-bearers, before surrendering, were seen to fling

their Eagles into the river to sink there.

How one Eagle, during the battle on the 18th, was momentarily lost, and

then regained by a splendid act of valour, is told by Caulaincourt,

who was on Napoleon’s staff, and witnessed the gallant deed that

won the Eagle back. In the midst of the fighting, a number of Saxon

regiments abandoned Napoleon’s cause and went over \_en masse\_ to

the enemy. To signalise their defection they turned on the nearest

French regiment and mobbed it; attacking it at close quarters with

the bayonet. Thrown into confusion by the unexpected onslaught, the

French were for the moment broken and forced back, whereupon the

Saxons, making for the Eagle, got possession of it. “A young officer of

Hussars,” relates Caulaincourt, “whose name I forget, rushed headlong

into the enemies’ ranks. In the charge some of the miserable renegades

had carried off one of our Eagles. The gallant young officer rescued

it, but at the cost of his life. He threw the Eagle at the Emperor’s

feet, and then he himself fell, mortally wounded and bathed in blood.

The Emperor was deeply moved. ‘With such men,’ he exclaimed, ‘what

resources does not France possess!’”

The regiments left by Napoleon to garrison the fortresses in Germany,

at Stettin, at Magdeburg, Torgau, Dantzic, and elsewhere, previous to

surrendering took steps to prevent their Eagles falling into the hands

of their adversaries. In every case they destroyed them, smashing

the Eagles into small fragments, which were either distributed among

officers and men, or else thrown into the ditch of the fortress. In

more than one case they melted the Eagles down, and broke up and

buried the metal, while the flags were burned.

[Sidenote: KEPT FROM THE HANDS OF THE FOE]

At Dresden, where Marshal St. Cyr had to surrender, a month after

Leipsic, the terms granted by the Austrian general conducting the siege

allowed the troops to return to France with their arms, their baggage,

and their Eagles, seven in number. Superior authority, however,

cancelled the privilege. The garrison had already started on their

march when, to their utter consternation, the capitulation was abruptly

annulled by the Austrian Generalissimo, Schwartzenberg, with the result

that the hapless troops were compelled to yield themselves prisoners

at discretion. The soldiers were defenceless and could only submit to

their hard fate. They did not, however, let their seven Eagles pass

into the enemy’s hands. Five of the seven were broken up, and the flags

torn to pieces and divided among the regiments. Two of the Eagles,

those of the 25th of the Line and the 85th, were concealed intact by

two officers, who kept them from discovery for months, while they were

prisoners in Hungary. After the Peace, in the following year, they

brought them back to France--to meet there the doom that awaited all

the Eagles of Napoleon of which the officials of the Bourbon \_régime\_

got possession.

One memento of the Winter Campaign in Eastern France is now at the

Invalides--the Eagle of the 5th of the Line. It was found in the

river Aube at Arcis after the battle there, which, in its result,

decided the fate of Napoleon; its outcome being the immediate march of

the Allied armies on Paris. The 5th was one of the regiments of the

rearguard column, under Oudinot, half of which was drowned in the river

in trying to get across at night, after stubbornly holding out in the

town all the afternoon in order to enable Napoleon to cross the river

in safety. The 5th was one of the regiments that sacrificed themselves.

Its Eagle-bearer was among the drowned, and his Eagle sank with him. It

remained in the bed of the stream until long afterwards, when it was

accidentally discovered, and fished up.

The 132nd of the Line of the modern army of France commemorates on its

flag a feat of arms done under the Eagle of the old 132nd of Napoleon’s

Army, after having been saved from the Prussians at the Katzbach,

and again at Leipsic. It was in one of the fights in the closing

campaign in Eastern France. The proud legend inscribed in golden

letters, “Rosny, 1814: Un contre huit,” commemorates how the regiment,

single-handed, held at bay and beat off an enemy eight times its force,

saving itself for the third time, and its Eagle.

[Sidenote: THE GRAND ARMY’S LAST PARADE]

The surviving Eagles of the war, the last to face the enemy in the

north of those presented on the Field of Mars, paid their last salute

to the War Lord at Napoleon’s final review of the remnants of the

Grand Army at Rheims on March 15, 1814.

A pitiful, a moving, sight was that hapless military spectacle: the

closing parade before Napoleon of his last remaining soldiers.

This is how Alison describes it: “How different from the splendid

military spectacles of the Tuileres or Chammartin, which had so often

dazzled his sight with the pomp of apparently irresistible power!

Wasted away to half the numbers which they possessed when they crossed

the Marne a fortnight before, the greater part of the regiments

exhibited only the skeletons of military array. In some, more officers

than privates were to be seen in the ranks; in all, the appearance

of the troops, the haggard air of the men, their worn-out uniforms,

and the strange motley of which they were composed, bespoke the total

exhaustion of the Empire. It was evident to all that Napoleon was

expending his last resources. Besides the veterans of the Guard--the

iron men whom nothing could daunt, but whose tattered garments and

soiled accoutrements bespoke the dreadful fatigue to which they had

been subjected--were to be seen young conscripts, but recently torn

from the embraces of maternal love, and whose wan visages and faltering

steps told but too clearly that they were unequal to the weight of the

arms they bore. The gaunt figures and woeful aspect of the horses,

the broken carriages and blackened mouths of the guns, the crazy and

fractured artillery wagons which defiled past, the general confusion

of arms, battalions, and uniforms, even in the best appointed corps,

spoke of the mere remains of the vast military army which had so long

stood triumphant against the world in arms. The soldiers exhibited none

of their ancient enthusiasm as they defiled past the Emperor; silent

and sad they took their way before him: the stern realities of war had

chased away its enthusiastic ardour. All felt that in this dreadful

contest they themselves would perish, happy if they had not previously

witnessed the degradation of France!”[35]

What is indeed the most interesting of all the Eagles, the most famous

battle-standard in the world, which for a time was at the Invalides, is

at present preserved in private hands in Paris--the Eagle of Napoleon’s

Old Guard, the Eagle of the “Adieu of Fontainebleau.” It is treasured

with devoted care in the family of the officer who commanded the

Grenadiers of the Guard in the retreat from Moscow, at Fontainebleau,

and at Waterloo--General Petit. It is kept in the house, in Paris, in

which the old general died, in the room he used as his \_salon\_. General

Petit refused to be parted from the Eagle of his regiment during his

lifetime; he kept it with him wherever he went, always in his personal

care. It was at the Invalides while General Petit was in residence

there as Governor of the Hospital.

[Sidenote: THE OLD GUARD AT FONTAINEBLEAU]

On that never-to-be-forgotten April forenoon of 1814, in the Court of

the White Horse of the Château of Fontainebleau, Napoleon embraced the

standard, and taking the Eagle in his hands, kissed it in front of the

veteran Grenadiers of the Old Guard. His travelling carriage, to convey

the fallen Emperor on the first stage of his journey to Elba, was in

waiting, close by, ready to start. Twelve hundred Grenadiers of the

Guard stood with presented arms all round the courtyard; drawn up in a

great hollow square as a guard of honour to render to the master they

adored the parting salute.

Napoleon passed slowly round the square and inspected the ranks, man

by man, looking intently into the scarred and war-worn, weather-beaten

old faces, each one of which was familiar to him. Their station on

every battlefield had been close at hand to where he took up his post.

Night after night, in every campaign from Austerlitz to those last

dreadful weeks, he had slept in their midst; his tent always pitched

in the centre of the camp of the Imperial Guard. That had been

Napoleon’s invariable custom in war. They had shared with him that

last forlorn-hope march to save Paris, until, completely worn out and

footsore, exhausted nature forbade their attempting to go farther. With

tears streaming from their eyes the old soldiers, before whose bayonets

in the charge no Continental foe had ever stood, mutely returned

Napoleon’s last wistful, pathetic look of farewell.

He addressed a few touching words to them, standing in the centre of

the square. Next he turned to General Petit, near at hand, and before

them he took the general in his arms, as representing all, and kissed

him on the cheek. “I cannot embrace you all,” exclaimed Napoleon in a

voice broken with emotion, yet which all could hear distinctly, “so I

embrace your General!” Then he motioned to the Porte-Aigle, standing

all the while before him, with the Eagle held in the attitude of salute.

“Bring me the Eagle,” he said, “that I may embrace it also!” “Que

m’apporte l’Aigle, que je l’embrasse aussi!” were Napoleon’s words.

The Porte-Aigle advanced and again inclined the Eagle forward to the

Emperor. Napoleon took hold of it, embraced and kissed it three times,

tears in his eyes, and displaying the deepest emotion.

[Illustration: NAPOLEON’S FAREWELL TO THE OLD GUARD AT FONTAINEBLEAU.

From a print after H. Vernet, kindly lent by Messrs. T. H. Parker, 45,

Whitcomb Street.]

“Ah, chère Aigle,” he exclaimed, “que les baisers que je te donne

retentissent dans la postérité.”

The Eagle-bearer then stepped back a pace.

“Adieu, mes enfants! Adieu, mes braves! Entourez moi encore une fois!”

were Napoleon’s closing words as the historic scene terminated.

The old soldiers all stood utterly broken down, weeping bitter tears,

overcome with grief, as Napoleon made his way to the carriage; the

members of the Household bowing low as he passed, and kissing his hand,

were all also in tears.

Finally, amid a mournful cry of “Vive l’Empereur!” Napoleon drove away.

[Sidenote: ASHES MINGLED WITH WINE]

As soon as Napoleon’s carriage was beyond the precincts, the Grenadiers

of the Guard solemnly lowered the Imperial Standard, flying above the

Château. There, in the courtyard, they burned it. Then, mixing the

ashes in a barrel of wine that was brought out, they handed round the

liquor in bowls and drank off the draught, pledging Napoleon with cries

of “Vive l’Empereur!” So it is related by one who was an eye-witness

and a partaker; one of the officers of the Old Guard.

Kept safely in concealment for ten months by General Petit, during

the Bourbon Restoration period in 1814, the Eagle of the Old Guard

appeared once more after the return from Elba. It faced the enemy for

the last time at Waterloo. Something of that will be said further on.

General Petit kept close beside it all through the retreat, during that

night of horror after Waterloo; a faithful band of devoted veterans

accompanying him and surrounding the Eagle. So it made its final return

to France, to be preserved for the rest of his life by the man who,

above all others, had most right to be custodian of the Eagle of the

Old Guard.

The Bourbon War Minister ordered it to be given up, to be burned

at the artillery dépôt at Vincennes with the other Eagles that the

Restoration officials were able to get hold of. General Petit flatly

and indignantly refused to part with the Eagle of the Old Guard. He was

able, as before, to conceal it successfully, in spite of every effort

to discover its whereabouts, until after the Revolution of 1830. Then,

at the last, it was safe.

[Sidenote: THE FLAG OF THE OLD GUARD]

Faded and frayed away in parts, the gold embroidery on it dulled and

tarnished from the lapse of years, and torn here and there round the

jagged bullet-holes in the silk, is now, in its old age, the Flag of

the Old Guard. As it was at first--as it was when it made its débût at

the opening of its career, on that December afternoon on the Field of

Mars--the flag is of rich crimson silk, fringed with gold, sprinkled

over on both sides with golden bees, and with, at the corners,

encircled in golden laurel-wreaths, the Imperial cypher, the letter

“N.” In shape it was--and of course is still--almost a square: a metre

deep, vertically, on the staff, and some half-dozen inches more than

that lengthwise, horizontally, in the fly. On one side, in the centre,

the Napoleonic Eagle is displayed, a gold embroidered Eagle poised on a

thunderbolt. Inscribed round the Eagle in letters of gold is the legend:

“GARDE IMPÉRIALE

L’EMPEREUR NAPOLÉON

AU 1^{ER} RÉGIMENT DES

GRENADIERS À PIED.”

On the other side are inscribed these fifteen names of Napoleon’s great

days in war, also in golden letters: “Marengo; Ulm; Austerlitz; Jéna;

Berlin; Eylau; Friedland; Madrid; Eckmühl; Essling; Wagram; Vienna;

Smolensk; Moskowa; Moscow.”

CHAPTER XI

THAT TERRIBLE MIDNIGHT AT THE INVALIDES

The Battalion Eagles of 1804, those of the second and third battalions

withdrawn by the decree of 1808, together with the Light Cavalry

(Hussar, Chasseur, and Dragoon) Eagles recalled in the autumn of 1805,

and a number of Light Infantry Eagles returned to the Ministry of War

at the end of 1807, perished in the flames of the great holocaust of

trophy-flags at the Invalides on the night of March 30, 1814, the night

of the surrender of Paris to the Allies.

It was on that tragic Wednesday night that the great sacrifice was

made, amid the bowed and weeping old soldiers of France, the veterans

of a hundred battlefields, on the most terrible and mournful occasion

in the wide-ranging annals of the great institution which the Grand

Monarque, in the full pride of his power, at the topmost pinnacle of

his renown, founded and opened in person with grandiose martial pomp

and State display. All was over for France on that night--

“Around a slaughtered army lay,

No more to conquer and to bleed:

The power and glory of the war

Had passed to the victorious Czar.”

The two marshals charged with the defence of Paris, Marmont and

Mortier, had on that afternoon placed the submission of the capital

in the hands of Alexander of Russia on the heights of Montmartre,

whence, and from the Buttes Chaumont and the other northern heights

from right to left, 300 loaded cannon pointed threateningly down over

the vanquished and panic-stricken city, supported by the bayonets

and sabres of 120,000 men, Russians and Prussians, Bavarians,

Würtemburgers, and Austrians, flushed and exultant in their hour of

supreme triumph, the soldiers of all the nations of the Continent at

war with Napoleon.

[Sidenote: NAPOLEON WITHIN TWELVE MILES]

It was at ten o’clock on that fateful night for France that the great

destruction of trophies at the Invalides took place. Napoleon had set

his last stake, had attempted his desperate last manœuvre, and had

failed. He had been foiled and baffled when within reach almost of his

goal. At that very hour indeed, only twelve miles away, he had just

been stopped in his wild midnight gallop, his final forlorn-hope effort

to reach the capital, by the news that all hope was past, that the

worst had happened, that Paris had fallen.

Only forty-eight hours before, on Monday night, at Saint-Dizier, a

small town 170 miles away, had Napoleon suddenly realised the gravity

of the catastrophe impending over Paris. He was at that moment in

the act of dealing the Allies a counter-stroke which he confidently

believed would save the situation and bring the enemy’s advance to a

general stand. Just a week before, he had abruptly turned back in his

retreat towards the capital and had boldly started to march across the

rear of the Allies in the direction of the Rhine. He would sever their

communications; he would cut the enemy off from their base. Calling out

the \_levée en masse\_ of the peasantry all over Eastern France, and at

the same time rallying to him the garrisons of the French fortresses

in Alsace and Lorraine, with 100,000 men at his disposal, led by Ney,

Macdonald, Victor, and Oudinot, while two other marshals, Marmont

and Mortier, held the enemy at bay in front of Paris, he was looking

forward to checkmate the Allies at the last moment and paralyse their

advance on the capital. It was a daring and masterly project; but the

Fortune of War was against Napoleon. He had sent word of his plans

to Marie Louise at the Tuileries, together with instructions to his

brother Joseph, Governor of Paris, but on the way a Cossack patrol

captured the bearer of the vitally important documents. Napoleon’s

despatch for once was not in cypher, and its full import was apparent

instantly. It was carried to the Czar Alexander, and forthwith laid

before a hastily convened Russian council of war. Another letter, taken

at the same time, laid bare the critical condition of affairs inside

Paris itself; describing how all was in confusion there, and that

treachery to the cause of the Empire was at work within the city. The

council of war decided to pay no heed to Napoleon’s counter-stroke,

and, instead, to march at once on Paris in full force. Marmont and

Mortier, it was known, could barely muster 6,000 regulars. With

Blücher’s Prussians, at that moment on the point of joining them,

the Allies could bring into line not far short of 150,000 men. This

final plan was agreed to on the afternoon of Friday, March 24, and the

general advance began at once.

[Sidenote: NAPOLEON’S BLANK DISMAY]

Napoleon knew nothing of what was happening until late on the night of

the 27th, the following Monday. Then he was suddenly made aware of the

full position. “Nothing,” exclaimed the doomed Emperor in blank dismay,

“but a thunderbolt can save us now.” The Allies then had not turned

back! The enemy nearest him, whom he had planned to attack next day,

believing them to be the Russian main army, was only--he discovered

at the last moment--a cavalry division, sent back to delude him and

prevent his finding out what was really going on. And the troops

advancing on Paris were already three clear days ahead of him! Napoleon

counter-marched his whole force at once to hasten to the rescue of the

capital. They would take the route by Sens, Troyes, and Fontainebleau,

making a sweep to keep clear of the enemy’s columns, and approach

Paris by the south bank of the Seine. It was a long march of fully 180

miles, but there was no other way open. Marmont and Mortier, to whom

the news of Napoleon’s intended approach was sent off immediately, must

manage to hold out in front of the city on the north bank until the

Emperor arrived.

Fresh news, however, and yet more serious, as to the imminence of

the grave peril threatening Paris, reached Napoleon during Tuesday

night. Leaving the army to follow, he pressed forward ahead of the

troops by himself in his travelling-carriage, escorted only by the Old

Guard. They hurried forward with feverish eagerness all that night

and the next day, the men of the Guard panting along at the double in

their effort to keep up. With hardly a halt, they struggled along,

famishing--most of the men had tasted no cooked food for the past five

days--shoeless most of them, plodding and splashing barefoot through

the mud, ankle deep; under a pitiless downpour of rain all the time.

By Wednesday evening, the 30th, they had reached Troyes, after a forty

miles march without a stop. There, still worse news reached Napoleon.

Marmont and Mortier had been disastrously defeated at Meaux, and in

consequence their defence of the northern heights outside the city was

all but hopeless.

[Sidenote: AT FULL GALLOP FOR PARIS]

Napoleon, on that, abandoned his travelling-carriage for a light

post-chaise, which set off at a gallop. He must now risk a ride

practically unattended, in the desperate hope of being able to evade

hostile patrols and get by stealth into the city. Once there, he

would himself take charge of the defence. The men of the Old Guard

were left behind at Troyes. They were worn out and unable, from sheer

exhaustion, to go a step farther. Only a troop of Cuirassiers rode with

the post-chaise, and most of these had to give up and drop back as the

chaise raced forward, Napoleon himself from time to time calling from

the windows to the postillions to keep on flogging the horses and go

faster and faster. At every stopping-place to change horses the Emperor

sent off a courier to tell Paris to hold out; and at each post-house

he received still more alarming messages from the city. Now he heard

that the Empress and his little son had had to fly from Paris. Then

he learned that the whole city was in a state of complete panic, with

affrighted peasants from all round crowding in; the shops and banks all

shut; the theatres closed, a thing that had not happened even at the

height of the Reign of Terror; everywhere chaos and hopeless despair.

After that came the news that the enemy were advancing so fast that

they were expected at any moment before the City barriers.

At ten o’clock Napoleon arrived at the village of Fromenteau, near

the Fountains of Juvisy, twelve and a half miles from Paris. The

post-chaise had to stop there again for a relay of fresh horses. As it

drew up, a party of soldiers passed by, coming from the direction of

the capital. Not knowing who was in the chaise, some of them shouted

out to the occupants, Napoleon, and Caulaincourt, who had been riding

with the Emperor: “Paris has surrendered!”

The dread news struck Napoleon like a bullet between the eyes. “It is

impossible! The men are mad!” he hissed out, gripping at the cushions

of his seat. Then he turned to his companion: “Find an officer and

bring him to me!”

One rode up, as it happened, at that moment, a General Belliard.

Napoleon questioned him eagerly, and he gave the Emperor sufficient

details to leave no doubt of what had befallen. Great drops of sweat

stood on Napoleon’s forehead. He turned, quivering with excitement, to

Caulaincourt. “Do you hear that?” he ejaculated hoarsely, fixing a gaze

on his companion under the light of the lamps, the bare memory of which

made Caulaincourt shudder ever after to his dying day.

They left the chaise, and looking across the Seine Napoleon saw to

the north and east, in the direction of Villeneuve Saint-Georges, the

glare of the enemy’s watch-fires. Marshal Berthier now came up in a

second post-chaise which had been following the Emperor’s. Speaking

excitedly, Napoleon declared that he would go on to Paris. He set off

walking rapidly along the road in the dark, leaving the horses to be

put to and the post-chaise to pick him up. Berthier and Caulaincourt

attended him, and General Belliard and some dragoons followed at a few

paces behind. Napoleon rejected every remonstrance and refused to turn

back. “I asked them,” exclaimed Napoleon, talking half to himself, half

to his companions, “to hold out for only twenty-four hours! Miserable

wretches! Marmont swore that he would be cut to pieces rather than

yield! And Joseph ran away: my own brother! To surrender the capital

to the enemy: what poltroons!” So he went on in a breathless torrent

of words. He added finally: “They have capitulated: betrayed their

country; betrayed their Emperor; degraded France! It is too terrible!

Every one has lost his head! When I am not there they do nothing but

add blunder to blunder.”

[Sidenote: “MISERABLE WRETCHES!”]

But to go on, with Paris in the hands of an army of 150,000 men,

was out of the question. Napoleon had to bow to the inevitable. He

at length yielded to the protests of the others. He stopped beside

the Fountains of Juvisy. “He sat down on the parapet of one of the

fountains,” described Labédoyère, an eye-witness, “and remained above

a quarter of an hour with his head resting on his hands, lost in the

most painful reflections.” Then he rose, went back to the post-chaise,

and, telling General Belliard to rally all the men he could at Essonne,

set off to drive to Fontainebleau. He reached there at six next morning.

Between ten o’clock on Wednesday night and six o’clock on Thursday

morning the tragedy at the Invalides was enacted. Its opening scene

took place just as Napoleon’s post-chaise was drawing up in the village

of Fromenteau. Its final scene took place just as the post-chaise was

entering the courtyard of Fontainebleau.

The Capitulation of Paris was signed before the Barrier of La Villette

at five in the afternoon. Its first article laid down that the French

army must evacuate Paris within twelve hours: before five o’clock next

morning. The last clause recommended the city to the mercy of the

Allied Sovereigns, and of the Czar Alexander in particular.

All day long the booming of cannon and rattle of musketry had dinned

in the ears of the trembling and terrified Parisians, ever steadily

drawing nearer. The marshals, Marmont and Mortier, had made their last

stand, and, resisting desperately to the last, in a struggle in which

the Allies lost two to every one of the defenders, so ferocious was the

contest, had been beaten back into the city. They carried back with

them, so gallantly had they counter-attacked at one point, the standard

of the Second Squadron of the Russian Garde du Corps--now a trophy in

the present collection at the Invalides.

[Sidenote: BEYOND ALL HOPE NOW]

The outnumbered and exhausted troops could make no further fight,

although, to the end, many of the soldiers were for holding out to

the last cartridge. The \_Générale\_ had beaten to arms at two in the

morning; at six, with sunrise, the enemy’s guns opened fire; from then

until late in the afternoon the fighting had gone on incessantly.

All was over by four o’clock. From east to west, from Charenton and

Belleville, right round to Neuilly, the Allies, the Russians, Blücher’s

Prussians, and the Austrians, had captured every position capable of

defence, one after the other, by sheer weight of numbers, and had

carried at the point of the bayonet every place of vantage held by the

French. Woronzeff and the Prince of Würtemburg had stormed Romainville,

La Villette, and La Chapelle. Langeron and the Russian Imperial Guard

were masters of the heights of Montmartre and the Buttes Chaumont,

looking down directly on Paris. Eighty-six guns had been taken from the

marshals since the morning; nearly six thousand soldiers and National

Guards had fallen, killed or wounded, facing the foe. A six-miles

long line of batteries and battalions on the side of the Allies had

closed in to within short musket range of the Paris barriers. Already

the Russian cannon were opening fire on the city, and their shells

were bursting over the central streets of Paris; falling, some in the

Chaussée d’Antin and on the Boulevard des Italiens.

At four o’clock Marmont, who had been the soul of the defence,

fighting, now on horseback, now on foot, using his sword at times--“the

marshal was seen everywhere in the thickest of the fight, a dozen or

more soldiers were bayoneted at his side, and his hat was riddled

with bullets”--at four o’clock Marmont repassed within the barriers

to announce that further defence was impossible. He was scarcely

recognisable, we are told--“he had a beard of eight days’ growth; the

great-coat which covered his uniform was in tatters; from head to foot

he was blackened with powder-smoke.” Then had to be done the only thing

that was left to do. Marmont and Mortier held a hasty conference, and

after it a trumpeter and an aide de camp carrying a white flag rode out

through the firing line to the nearest advanced post of the Allies. The

officer was taken before the Czar Alexander on the plateau of Chaumont,

and Paris surrendered. The last sounds that were heard on the French

side as the firing ceased came from a battalion of the Imperial Guard

which had been serving under Marmont, from a scanty remnant of veterans

stubbornly resisting at bay to the last--shouts of “Vive l’Empereur!”

[Sidenote: THE FLAG OF THE POLYTECHNIC]

The old pensioners of the Invalides manfully did their duty, and bore

their part in the defence all day, as well as they were able. All

who could carry a musket had gone out to the barriers; others did

their best by helping to bring up ammunition. Most of them fought

at the Barrière du Trône on the Vincennes road, assisting the brave

lads of the Polytechnic School to hold the post and man a battery of

eight-and-twenty cannon in front of the barrier; until a headlong

charge of Russian cavalry, Pahlen’s dragoons with some Cossacks,

swooped down from the flank, annihilating the devoted band of gunners.

Those of the boys who were left, however, saved the school flag,

presented to the Polytechnic just ten years before by the Emperor with

his own hand, on the Day of the Eagles on the Field of Mars. With the

Invalides’ veterans and some of the National Guards, the survivors

held the barrier throughout the day to the end, beating back repeated

attempts of the Russians to storm the gate. The lads, finally, after

learning that Marmont had capitulated, made their way back to the

school, and there burned their precious standard to save it from

falling into the enemy’s hands. Those who were left of the veterans

hastened back to the Invalides at the same time, overcome with anxiety

to learn what was to happen to their own priceless treasures within the

Hospital, the trophy flags. There were at the Invalides at that time,

by one account, 1417 trophy flags; according to another account--which

included apparently in the total the returned Battalion and Light

Infantry and Cavalry Eagles--altogether 1,800 standards.

Within the walls of the Invalides all was deep gloom and hopeless

despondency among those in charge. Even at nightfall, as it would

appear, the authorities had not made up their minds how the trophies

were to be disposed of.

It is a hapless and pitiful story from first to last. Some time

previously, while the Allied armies were still being kept at bay on

the plains of Champagne, the Governor of the Invalides, old Marshal

Serrurier, a distinguished veteran of the Revolutionary Army, had

applied to the Minister of War for instructions as to the disposal of

the trophies at the Invalides in the event of the enemy advancing on

Paris. The only answer he received was a formal letter to the effect

that the matter would have to go before the Emperor. At that time

Napoleon was in the midst of his last forlorn-hope attempt to stem the

tide of invasion; in the midst of a life-and-death struggle, fighting

desperately day after day at one place or another. The Ministry of War

apparently pigeon-holed the application after that, and forgot all

about the trophies at the Invalides until the actual day of the attack

on Paris--until that Wednesday forenoon.

[Sidenote: FORGOTTEN UNTIL TOO LATE]

Then, when already Marmont’s outer line of defence had been forced,

and the last fight for the inner heights overlooking the city was

raging furiously, almost within sight from the Invalides, a letter

from the War Minister was handed to Serrurier. It “trusted that the

Marshal had taken steps for the safety of the trophies; especially

for the preservation of Frederick the Great’s sword. The flags,”

continued the letter, “had best be detached from their staves, and

rolled up carefully. The War Minister is sure that your Excellency

will do all that is possible. The road to the Loire is open.” Such

were the instructions sent to the Invalides after the eleventh hour!

Then, during the afternoon, when the enemy’s bombshells, fired from the

plateau of Chaumont, were falling in the heart of the city, a single

artillery wagon, or fourgon, a vehicle barely large enough to remove

a small percentage of what there was to carry away, drew up at the

main gates of the Invalides. It brought also ten more trophy flags,

collected from somewhere in Paris. In the general confusion nobody,

it would seem, even inquired what they were or where they came from.

The driver’s instructions were merely that “they were to go away with

the Invalides trophies.” The ten flags were taken out and stacked in a

corridor for the time being, while the fourgon waited unheeded at the

gate until after dark.

What steps Marshal Serrurier took during the afternoon to secure

adequate transport is unknown; or, indeed, what he did with himself

all that time. The Governor was seen just before the dinner-hour in

the Corridor d’Avignon, in an out-of-the-way part of the building, in

conference with the Lieutenant-Governor and an adjutant-major. Another

officer, Adjutant Vollerand, was with them, holding in his hands

Frederick the Great’s sword and sash. Apparently they did not want to

be observed, and were discussing how to hide the relics or bury them

within the precincts of the Invalides. After that nothing more was seen

of Serrurier at the Invalides until between nine and ten at night, some

hours after the Capitulation, and when it had become known that the

Allies intended to occupy Paris in force, and that their troops would

enter and take possession of the city early next morning. Then the

Governor reappeared.

A few minutes after nine o’clock the veterans of the Invalides, who

had been restlessly pacing about the halls and corridors during the

evening, or standing about in dejected groups in the courtyards, not

knowing what they were to do, were suddenly summoned to muster at once

in the Grand Court, or Cour d’Honneur. All turned out from the wards

and paraded, forming up by the light of lanterns. All but those who

were bedridden were brought out, the maimed and cripples being led out,

or hobbling out on their crutches, together with the survivors of those

who had fought so gallantly at the barriers during the day, their faces

still begrimed with powder-smoke, their clothes torn and stained,

some without their hats, their arms in slings, or with bandages over

recent wounds. Then the tall, spare figure of the Governor, a grim,

hard-featured old warrior, white-haired, over seventy years of age, was

seen emerging from his quarters, with the senior staff-officers of the

Hospital following in rear. Serrurier harangued the pensioners briefly.

He told them that the enemy would enter the city next day and would

present themselves at the Invalides to enforce the giving up of the

trophies. What did the men of the Invalides desire should be done?

[Sidenote: “LET US BURN THEM HERE!”]

There was a pause for a moment; a dead silence, as the old

soldiers gazed dumbfoundedly at one another. Then one man stepped

out to the front and spoke up for the rest. A battle-scarred old

sergeant-pensioner of the Grenadiers of the Old Guard answered the

Governor on behalf of his comrades, his reply, greeted as it was by

vociferous shouts of approval on every side, voicing the unanimous wish

of the veterans. “If they will not let us keep our banners, let us burn

them here! We will swallow the ashes!” The order to make a bonfire of

the trophies then and there was issued forthwith.

Anything that came to hand for fuel was eagerly seized, and a great

pile speedily made of broken-up stools and mess-tables and forms,

hauled out from the barrack-rooms withindoors. They were stacked in

a heap just in front of the pedestal on which it had been intended to

erect an equestrian statue of the heroic Marshal Lannes, who died from

his wounds at Aspern in the arms of Napoleon. Meanwhile, parties of

men ran inside with ladders, and set to work to strip the dining-halls

and the Chapel of the rows of flags hanging up there. They bore them

outside, roughly bundled together in their arms; some, silently, with

frowning, stern-set faces and set teeth; others beside themselves with

rage, and cursing savagely aloud; others sullenly muttering oaths; not

a few of the old fellows with tears streaming down their cheeks. They

carried the trophies out and heaped them up into an immense funeral

pyre. The battalion and other Eagles shared the fate of the captured

trophies--standards, some of these, that had been borne under fire in

the thick of triumphant battle at Austerlitz, and Jena, at Auerstadt

and Friedland--to save them on the morrow from falling into the hands

of those in whose defeat and humiliation they had had their part. The

fire was lighted and the masses of tattered silk blazed up furiously.

When the flames were at their fiercest, Marshal Serrurier stepped

forward and with his own hand flung into the midst of the fiery mass

the sword of Frederick the Great.

For half the night the veterans stood round and watched the flames

complete the work of destruction. They stood massed round in a densely

packed throng of sullen, gloomy, brokenhearted men. They stayed there

until long after midnight, gazing, in a state of dull despair, at the

fire; while some now and again stirred up the glowing fuel and made

the flames leap up afresh, roaring and crackling and casting a dull

red throbbing glare over the old walls and rows of windows all round,

and gleaming on the lofty gilded dome of the Invalides, in itself an

intended memento of victory. On first seeing the golden domes of the

Kremlin as he approached Moscow, Napoleon had sent orders to Paris to

have the dome of the Invalides gilded as a memorial of his achievement

of the goal of the campaign! Most of the veterans stood there

throughout the greater part of that cold March night, watching until

the fire had died down and only a great heap of smouldering cinders

remained; all that was left of the trophies of victorious France.

[Sidenote: THE TROPHIES OF TWO CENTURIES]

Among the vast array of foreign trophies at the Invalides that perished

on that night were English flags nearly two centuries old, the remains

of the spoil of some forty-four English banners of Charles the First’s

soldiers, triumphantly carried to Paris from the Ile de Rhé in November

1627 and hung in Notre Dame. Others flags destroyed there, too, dated

from the wars of the Grand Monarque; spoils won on the battlefield by

the famous Condé and Turenne; also trophies taken from William the

Third at Steenkirk and Landen and elsewhere; the British and Dutch

and Danish and Bavarian ensigns won by Turenne’s great successor,

Marshal Luxembourg, “le Tapissier de Notre Dame,” as they dubbed him

at Versailles, for the almost innumerable trophies sent by Luxembourg

to be hung up in the Cathedral of Paris, with State processions and Te

Deums in the presence of the King. Other British battle-spoils, the

trophies of France, which passed out of existence at the Invalides on

that night were these: a flag taken at Fontenoy by the Irish Brigade;

the regimental colours surrendered by the garrison of Minorca which

Admiral Byng failed to rescue; those of another British garrison of

Minorca of the time of the Great Siege of Gibraltar, when France, for

the second time, wrested the island from England; four British and

Hessian regimental flags surrendered to Washington at Yorktown and sent

by Congress as a gift to the King of France; flags taken by the French

from British West India garrisons in the same war; besides British

naval ensigns also taken during the American War, with other British

ship-flags, some of which indeed dated from the earlier battle times

of Duguay Trouin and Jean Bart. Destroyed at the Invalides also on

that Wednesday night was a British naval ensign from Trafalgar. It had

been hoisted on board one of Nelson’s prizes, the \_Algéciras\_. In the

storm after the battle the ship was in imminent peril of wreck, and the

French prisoners on board were liberated in order to help to save her.

They used their freedom to overpower the small British prize-crew and

carried the vessel off into Cadiz, whence the British ensign, hoisted

originally in triumph over the French tricolor during the battle of two

days before, on the \_Algéciras\_ being captured, was sent as a trophy to

Paris. There were also destroyed at the Invalides at the same time the

ensign of Lord Cochrane’s famous brig-of-war, the \_Speedy\_, captured in

the Mediterranean in 1801, and those of three British line-of-battle

ships, the \_Berwick\_, the \_Swiftsure\_, and the \_Hannibal\_, taken within

the previous twenty years.

[Sidenote: SPOILS TAKEN IN NAVAL FIGHTS]

Most of the trophies won by Napoleon and the Grand Army all over

Europe, and by the Armies of the Republic and Consulate before

that, perished in the holocaust: the spoils of Valmy and Fleurus

and Jemmapes; of Hohenlinden; of Dego and Mondovi; of Rivoli and

Montenotte; of Castiglione, Lodi, and Arcola; of Zurich and Marengo,

and other victories. On that night, too, passed out of existence the

famous flag of the Army of Italy presented by Napoleon, and bearing

inscribed on it the names of eighty triumphs on the battlefield and the

detailed record of the taking of 150,000 prisoners, 170 standards, 550

siege-guns, and 600 pieces of field artillery; the Horse-tail banners

of the Mamelukes, taken by Napoleon at the battle of the Pyramids; the

historic standard of the Knights of St. John, won in hand-to-hand fight

outside the main gate of Valetta. Most of the 340 Prussian standards

Napoleon sent to Paris after the Jena campaign, together with the sword

and Black Eagle sash of Frederick the Great, as well as the recovered

French trophies of the Seven Years’ War, originally won by Frederick at

Rosbach, the standards of Frederick the Great’s Guards, and Austrian

spoils taken by the Prussians at Leuthen, Kolin, and Hohenfriedburg,

all of which had been carried off to Paris by Napoleon--these were

among the war-treasures destroyed at the Invalides on that night. With

them went into the flames the Grand Army’s Russian trophies from Eylau

and Friedland, the Austrian trophies from Eckmühl and Wagram, besides

many Spanish and Portuguese trophies taken before Wellington landed in

the Peninsula to turn the tide of war.

[Sidenote: AFTER DUPONT’S SURRENDER]

One French Eagle which perished on that night was the survivor of a

disaster: Dupont’s surrender at Bailen in Andalusia in 1808,[36] at

the outset of the Spanish insurrection; that cruel humiliation for

the arms of France, the news of which came on Europe with all the

startling effect of a thunderclap, and drove Napoleon nearly frantic

in his furious indignation. It had been one of three Eagles taken by

the Spaniards, that of the 24me Légère, and had been recovered by the

daring of an officer of the regiment, one of the prisoners, Captain

Lanusse. Confined in a prison-hulk at Cadiz, he escaped to shore

one night, managed to find out where his regiment’s flag was kept,

displayed as a Spanish trophy, got hold of it, and then made his way

outside the city into the lines of the besieging French army. There

he presented the Eagle to Marshal Soult, who forwarded it direct to

Napoleon. Lanusse, as his reward, was promoted a \_chef de bataillon\_ of

the 8th of the Line, and fell to the bayonet of a British soldier of

the 87th Royal Irish Fusiliers at Barrosa. The recovered Eagle Napoleon

sent to the Invalides.

By morning all that remained of the proud trophies of France at the

Invalides was a heap of grey ashes, fragments of charred flag-poles,

and scraps of partly molten metal. The \_débris\_ was raked up at

daylight, and shovelled into the artillery fourgon of the previous

afternoon, which had been standing all night outside the main gate

of the Invalides. The artillery wagon drove off with it to the Seine

near by and emptied the heap into the river. That was the end of the

night’s destruction.

[Sidenote: ALL THAT WAS DREDGED UP]

Some portion of the \_débris\_ was recovered from the Seine a year

afterwards, and is preserved in the Chapel of the Invalides now. In

June 1815 a workman, doing some repairs by the riverside, discovered a

portion of a flag under water, and on hearing of that, two patriotic

young Frenchmen, an engineer and a journalist, privately set to work

soon afterwards to see if they could fish up anything that might

be worth preserving. At the time the Allies were in possession of

Paris, during the second occupation, after Waterloo, and the two

young men had to proceed cautiously. They were successful in the end

in recovering portions of 183 trophies, metal spear-head ornaments,

from ensign-staves mostly. Seventy-eight were later identified as of

Austrian origin; one as part of a British flag; two as having belonged

to Russian standards; various fragments as the remains of thirty-nine

Prussian standards; four from Spanish flags with Bourbon fleurs-de-lis;

and two fragments of Turkish standards from Egypt. The remainder of the

salvage it was impossible to identify.

That the great sacrifice had not been made in vain, was speedily

apparent. In the course of the morning after the bonfire, a little

before noon on Thursday, March 31, within two hours of the entry into

Paris of the vanguard of the Allied armies, a Russian aide de camp

presented himself at the Invalides, and, in the name of the Allied

sovereigns, demanded a statement of the trophies kept there. The

officer came up on horseback, accompanied by a mounted man of the

National Guard, and an armed escort of Russian dragoons. The main

gate was open as usual, and the Russian officer rode through without

taking notice of the gate-sentry’s challenge. He was only stopped

by a rush of the pensioners’ day-guard, called out by the sentry’s

shout of alarm--“Aux armes!” The guard turned out and faced the aide

de camp with lowered halberds. The Russian colonel protested, but

the officer on duty refused to let him pass without orders from his

own chief, and General Darnaud, the Lieutenant-Governor, was sent

for. That officer came, and the Russian dismounted and explained his

mission. He had orders, he said, to “take cognisance” of the trophies

of the Invalides. General Darnaud replied bluntly: “Very good, I will

permit you to visit the Hôtel. Come with me!” The general added: “As

to the trophies, sir, we have dealt with them according to the laws of

war!” “On en avait agi suivant les lois de guerre!” were his words.

The Russian did not seem to grasp the general’s meaning, and stood

still for a moment, staring blankly at him. On that, Madame Darnaud,

the Lieutenant-Governor’s wife, who had followed into the courtyard

immediately after her husband, interposed. She addressed the officer,

speaking volubly and angrily, but only to draw down on herself from the

Russian the uncivil rejoinder that he had not come there to talk to a

woman! After that, the general, accompanied by some of the men of the

main guard with shouldered halberds, formally conducted the officer

inside the Invalides, the party taking their way along the colonnade

round the Court of Honour, in the midst of which could be seen the wide

burnt-out space where the fire had been, the pungent smell of the fumes

from which still hung about the place, and so into the Chapel of St.

Louis. There the scene that met the Russian aide de camp’s eyes seemed

to stagger him: bare blank walls, the gallery stripped and defaced;

with empty and broken metal sockets here and there to show where the

flags had been fastened up. The interior had been entirely cleared from

end to end along the sides. It was absolutely unrecognisable to any who

had seen it before. The Russian officer, who had visited the Invalides

six or seven years previously, after Tilsit, could only gaze round

dumbly, utterly taken aback. He muttered something, but did not speak

aloud. Then, glaring round savagely into the eyes of those about him,

he turned away abruptly, and was conducted to the Outer Court, where he

remounted his horse, and rode off hastily in the direction whence he

had come.

[Sidenote: THE WALLS STRIPPED AND BARE]

All Napoleon’s trophies, however, did not perish at the Invalides.

Some of the Grand Army’s captured flags, as it so chanced, escaped

destruction on that night, and are at the Invalides now. They are

in the Chapel and in the Salle Turenne, besides half a hundred in

the Crypt, grouped round Napoleon’s tomb. The forty-five Austrian

flags taken at Ulm are beside Napoleon’s tomb, with nine other flags.

Presented by the Emperor to the Senate, as has been told, the Ulm

trophies, during the night of March 30, were hastily taken down from

where they had been hung in the Grand Salon for the past nine years,

and hidden in a vault below. They made a second public appearance on

the occasion of Napoleon’s funeral at the Invalides in 1840, when they

were placed at the head of the coffin. They have ever since been kept

beside the tomb.

The Austerlitz trophies met another fate. Kept at Notre Dame, they

disappeared mysteriously from there in the early morning of the day of

the entry of the Allies into Paris. At three in the morning of March

31 an urgent message from the Prefect of the Seine was delivered at

Notre Dame, calling on the Cathedral authorities to take down and

conceal the Austerlitz trophies at once. The Chapter met hastily in the

Archbishop’s room, and the flags were all down within half an hour.

They have never been seen since, nor was their fate ever accounted for.

[Sidenote: HOW FIFTY-ONE FLAGS WERE SAVED]

At the Luxembourg Palace were displayed 110 trophies, the spoils

of the Eagles, won from all the nations of Europe and presented to

the \_Corps Legislatif\_ by Napoleon. They were safely removed on the

night of March 30, and were hidden securely. Brought out and set up

again a year later, on Napoleon’s return from Elba, the authorities

forgot about hiding them again in the confusion after Waterloo. As the

result more than half of them are now in Berlin. Blücher sent a party

of staff officers to seize the entire collection, but a sharp-witted

functionary hoodwinked the Prussians on their arrival. They went back

to get written orders, and before they returned, as many as possible

of the trophies had been pulled down and got out of the way. One of

the attendants managed the affair on his own initiative, a hall-porter

named Mathieu. He was able to save and hide as many as fifty-one of the

flags, and they have since been forwarded to the Invalides. The other

fifty-nine trophies the Prussians seized and carried off. Two Austrian

standards taken by Napoleon at Marengo escaped destruction by having

been previously lent from the Invalides to an artist, Charles Vernet,

for a battle-picture he had been commissioned to paint for Napoleon.

They were in Vernet’s studio in March 1814. His son, Horace Vernet,

returned them in later days to the Invalides, where they now are.

In addition, it would seem, at least a moiety of the Invalides trophies

were kept back at the last moment by some of the veterans themselves.

Several of the old soldiers, it would appear, after stripping down the

flags from the walls, instead of carrying all out into the courtyard to

the bonfire, retained and hid a few of them on their own account, to

smuggle them outside afterwards and keep them in concealment.[37]

CHAPTER XII

THE EAGLES OF THE LAST ARMY

The Eagles came back to France with the return of Napoleon from Elba;

to lead the last Army to the campaign of the Hundred Days.

They “flew from steeple to steeple across France,” in Napoleon’s

expressive phrase, “from the shores of Fréjus until they alighted

on the towers of Notre Dame.” The enthusiasm that greeted their

reappearance spread like wild-fire; it blazed up like an exploding

magazine. The rapturous acclamation and enthusiasm with which the

Eagles were welcomed back was the measure of the prevailing discontent

and resentment among the soldiers at the harsh and unworthy treatment

they had received during the ten months of the restored \_régime\_.

The Army had come off badly by its change of masters. The Bourbons had

done all in their power to alienate its regard; as much through malice

in not a few cases, as through downright stupidity.

“Of all the institutions of France the most thoroughly national and

the most thoroughly democratic was the Army; it was accordingly

against the Army that the \_noblesse\_ directed its first efforts.

Financial difficulties made a large reduction in the forces necessary.

Fourteen thousand officers and sergeants were accordingly dismissed

on half-pay; but no sooner had this measure of economy been effected

than a multitude of emigrants who had served against the Republic in

the army of the Prince of Condé or in La Vendée were rewarded with all

degrees of military rank.... The tricolor, under which every battle of

France had been fought from Jemmapes to Montmartre, was superseded by

the white flag of the House of Bourbon, under which no living soldier

had marched to victory.... The Imperial Guard was removed from service

at the Palace, and the so-called Military Household of the old Bourbon

monarchy revived, with the privileges and the insignia belonging to the

period before 1775.”

The abolition of the Eagles was the preliminary step of all. A

justifiable measure, no doubt, from a political point of view, it

touched to the quick the military instinct of the nation. And on that

followed the abolition of the national tricolor in favour of the old

Bourbon white flag.

[Sidenote: EVERY ONE TO BE DESTROYED]

Within three weeks of the Farewell of Fontainebleau the Eagles of the

Army, with the tricolor standards, were officially proscribed; the

order went forth to send them to Paris forthwith for destruction in

the furnaces of the artillery dépôt at Vincennes. On May 12 it was

notified that the white Bourbon flag was again to be the standard of

the Army, with a brass fleur-de-lis at the head of the colour-staff in

place of the Eagle.

Every regiment was required to send its Eagle to the Ministry of War

in Paris on receipt of the order. No allowances or exceptions were

made; although in several instances officers urgently petitioned to be

allowed to retain their Eagles with the corps, if only as mementoes

of feats of arms achieved by the regiments in battle. Every request

was rejected, whatever the circumstances. There were reasons of State

policy no doubt, as has been said, against the general retention as

regimental standards of military insignia so intimately associated

with Napoleon; but in certain instances, at least, indulgence might

reasonably have been extended to the applications. There were personal

and romantic associations connected with some of the Eagles, specially

endearing them to the soldiers, for which privilege might well have

been accorded. One very hard case may be cited as typical of others:

that of the Eagle of the 25th of the Line.

The Eagle of the 25th had been carried under fire in some twenty

battles and all through the Moscow campaign; and had notable

battle-scars to show for its distinguished services. One leg and one

wing of the Eagle had been shot away in action, and there were five

bullet-holes in its metal body. Its maimed appearance, indeed, had

attracted Napoleon’s attention at a review, and he had stopped while

riding past the regiment and taken the Eagle into his hands, examining

it with extreme interest and putting his fingers into the bullet-holes,

finally returning it to the Porte-Aigle with a deep bow of respect. The

regiment almost worshipped their Eagle on its own account, for what

it had gone through; but it had further undergone yet more surprising

adventures. The 25th had been in the garrison of Dresden in 1813 when

Marshal St. Cyr had to capitulate to the Austrians. On the night

before the surrender the Eagle-staff was broken up and burned, and the

few strips of ragged silk that remained of the shot-torn regimental

tricolor flag were tied under an officer’s uniform for secret

conveyance out of the city. The shattered Eagle broke in two while

being removed from its staff, and its two fragments were concealed

under the petticoats of two vivandières who were to convey it in that

manner to the regimental dépôt in France. Under the capitulation the

garrison was granted the honours of war and a safe-conduct back to

France. The terms, however, were annulled by the Allied Sovereigns then

advancing, after Leipsic, to invade France, and in the outcome all the

regiments, after they had started for France, were made prisoners and

marched away to be interned in Hungary. The major of the 25th got back

the two fragments of the Eagle, stowed them away under his uniform, and

kept them about him by day and night for five months; until finally,

on his release after Napoleon’s abdication, he brought the Eagle back

across the Rhine, “wrapped up like contraband.”

[Sidenote: “SEND IT TO PARIS FORTHWITH!”]

On the 25th receiving the order to send in its Eagle for destruction,

he wrote personally to the Minister of War--General Dupont, of Bailen

notoriety, as has been said--who had never forgiven Napoleon’s harsh

usage of him, and now took every opportunity of paying back old

scores on the heads of his former comrades in arms. The major wrote

setting forth in detail the story of the regimental Eagle, relating

its exceptionally interesting career and its battle damages, also how

he had preserved it after Dresden, and implored the War Minister, in

the name of the regiment, that they might retain the two fragments to

be kept in the regimental “Salle d’Honneur” as an honoured relic. The

reply was a peremptorily worded command to send the Eagle to Paris

forthwith for destruction with the other Eagles of the Army. The

major, in the circumstances, considered himself compelled to comply.

He summoned the officers to his quarters, where they “paid their last

adieux to the object of veneration, and then, in their presence, the

Eagle fragments were packed in a box, and despatched to the Ministry of

War.”

The story, with others to the same effect, went the round of every

barrack-room in France, and wherever it was told, there were angry

murmurings and increased discontent.

By no means all the Eagles of the Army, it would appear, were given

up to the authorities in Paris. Not a few colonels flatly refused

to comply with Dupont’s order, taking the risk of prosecution or of

being turned out of the service summarily--a certainty in any event

under the new \_régime\_, as the majority of the senior regimental

officers anticipated, and as actually came to pass. General Petit of

the Grenadiers of the Old Guard, as has already been said, refused to

give up that famous Eagle, and concealed it successfully; and not a

few other officers did the same with the Eagles of their corps. Others

destroyed their regimental Eagles and either burned the silken tricolor

flags, or cut them up; dividing the ashes or fragments among their

comrades.

Their Eagles taken away, it was next made known to the Army, that the

“battle honours” and war distinctions of the various corps, won under

Napoleon, would not appear on the new regimental flags when issued.

“Austerlitz,” “Jena,” “Friedland,” and the other names of pride to the

Grand Army, were henceforward to be erased from military recognition.

The new flags, when publicly distributed in September 1814, showed

each a blank white field, with on it only an oval shield, bearing the

three fleurs-de-lis, the Royal Bourbon cognisance, and the name of the

corps--its new name, revived from Army Lists of the Old Monarchy, a

name long since forgotten and totally unfamiliar.

[Sidenote: NO MORE REGIMENTAL NUMBERS]

The regimental numbers of the Grand Army, ennobled by glorious

campaigns, immortalised by their associations of victory and

brilliant feats of arms, instinct with a renown acquired on a hundred

battlefields all over Europe, were at the same time done away with by

a stroke of the War Minister’s pen. That proved the most unpopular

measure of all; the cruellest of blows to the \_esprit de corps\_ and

pride of the former soldiers of Napoleon. It was felt as a gratuitous

insult; it was perhaps the most deeply resented injury of all. In

future, in place of their treasured regimental numbers, the various

corps of the Army, horse and foot, were to be known by departmental or

territorial names--meaningless to nine soldiers out of ten, and without

traditions--or else by the names of royal princes and princesses, and

titled personages, remembered only, some of them, as having fled on

the battlefield before the national armies. Bercheney and Chamborant

Hussars, Orléans Dragoons and Chasseurs, Regiments d’Artois, de Berri,

d’Armagnac, d’Angoulême, de Monsieur, d’Anjou, and so forth--what

traditions had designations such as these to compare with, to mention

in the same breath with, the traditions immortally associated with

the numbers, familiar as household words wherever French soldiers met

together, of the dragoon and chasseur regiments which Murat had led

at Austerlitz, of the dashing hussars of Lassalle, of the cuirassiers

whose resistless onset had swept the field at Jena, of the horsemen

at the sight of whose sabres before their gates Prussian fortresses

had surrendered at discretion? It came with a sense of personal

degradation, as a sort of desecration on the men of regiments like the

75th of the Line, or the 32nd, the 9th Light Infantry or the 84th, or

the 35th, or “Le terrible 57me”--to be labelled and hear themselves

officially addressed on parade as “Beauvoisis” or “Auxerre” or

“Nivernais,” by the name of some prosaic locality, or the style of some

ancient aristocrat, their titular colonel.[38]

[Sidenote: AT THE HEAD OF THE “ELBA GUARD”]

Napoleon announced the return of the Eagle in his first address to

the Army, sent off on his landing to be distributed broadcast among

the soldiers. “Come and range yourselves under the banners of your

chief.... Victory shall march at the \_pas de charge\_: the Eagle with

the national colours shall fly from steeple to steeple to the towers of

Notre Dame!”

The first of the regimental Eagles to make its appearance in France

accompanied Napoleon from Elba and landed with him. It was the Eagle

of the six hundred veterans of the Old Guard who, as the “Elba Guard,”

had volunteered to share Napoleon’s exile, and had formed his personal

escort. It figured in the historic scene at Grenoble a week after

the landing, where Napoleon, on meeting the first soldiers sent to

arrest his advance, by the magic of his presence and the sight of

the Eagle borne behind him, so dramatically won over to his side the

former 5th of the Line, the first regiment of the Army to throw in

its lot with Napoleon after Elba. The Eagle that had its part on the

historic occasion--with its silken tricolor flag, embroidered with

silver wreaths and scrollery, and golden bees, crowns and Imperial

cyphers, and inscribed “L’Empereur Napoléon à la Garde Nationale de

l’Ile Elba”--is now in private possession in England. It fell by some

means into the hands of a Prussian soldier at the occupation of Paris

after Waterloo and was sold a few weeks later to a visitor to Paris. In

the dramatic scene of the meeting of Napoleon with the 5th of the Line,

General Cambronne, Commander of the Elba Guard, bore the Eagle a few

paces behind Napoleon and held it up appealingly to the regiment.

[Sidenote: “LET ANY WHO WISHES--FIRE!”]

The 5th of the Line, says one story, vouched for by an eye-witness,

was marching out to block a narrow gorge through which ran the road

Napoleon was known to be taking. At some little way off, his party was

seen approaching, he himself being readily recognised by his small

cocked hat and \_redingote gris\_. Immediately the men were formed up

across the road, and, as Napoleon came nearer, they were ordered to

make ready and present. They did so: the muskets came up and were

levelled. Then came a pause; dead silence; an interval of breathless

suspense. Napoleon’s own action decided the issue. Stepping rapidly

forward, opening and throwing back his great-coat as he did so, he

called aloud to the regiment: “Soldats, voilà votre Empereur! Que celui

d’entre vous qui voudra le tuer, faire feu sur lui!” (“Soldiers, here

is your Emperor! Let any one who wishes to kill him fire on him!”) A

Royalist officer hastily called out the order: “Le voilà! donnez feu,

soldats!” But not a shot came. The next instant, with shouts of “Vive

l’Empereur!” the soldiers lowered their muskets, broke their ranks,

and rushed forward to surround Napoleon and welcome him in a frenzy of

enthusiasm.

According to another story, this is what took place. Before the word

“Fire!” could be given, Napoleon had stepped forward, close up to the

muzzles of the levelled muskets. With a smile on his face he began in

his usual colloquial, familiar way when talking to the men: “Well,

soldiers of the 5th, how are you all? I am come to see you again: is

there any one of you who wishes to kill me?” Shouts came in reply of

“No, no, Sire! certainly not!” The muskets went down; Napoleon passed

along the ranks, inspecting the men just as of old; after that the

regiment faced about, took the lead of the party, and, with Napoleon in

the middle and the “Elba Guard” bringing up the rear, all marched on

towards Grenoble.

[Sidenote: MARSHAL NEY’S DILEMMA]

There, meanwhile, events had been moving rapidly. The commandant of

the garrison was an \_émigré\_ officer, but most of the troops had been

won over for Napoleon by Colonel Labédoyère, at the head of the 7th

of the Line. The commandant ordered the gates to be closed, which was

done; also the cannon on the ramparts to be loaded. That order was duly

obeyed; “but the men rammed home the cannon-balls first, before putting

in the powder, so that the guns were useless.” Labédoyère marched out

with his regiment to meet Napoleon, the band playing, “and carrying

the Eagle of the regiment, which had been concealed and preserved.”

They met Napoleon a short distance from Grenoble and, with the 5th, led

the way in, arriving after dark. “On Napoleon’s approach, the populace

thronged the ramparts with torches; the gates were burst open; Napoleon

was borne through the town in triumph by a wild and intermingled crowd

of soldiers and workpeople.”[39]

Napoleon entered Paris on the night of March 20. The Eagles made their

first appearance in the capital next day. They had been officially

restored as the standards of the Army by an Imperial decree issued on

March 13 from Lyons.

[Sidenote: AT THE FIRST REVIEW IN PARIS]

Paris saw them again first at the review of the garrison of the capital

which Napoleon held within twenty-four hours of his arrival; on the

Place du Carrousel, in front of the Tuileries. There too the Imperial

Guard, reconstituted that same morning, made their public reappearance.

In the midst of the brilliant scene, as Napoleon was ending the address

of personal thanks for their loyalty that he made to the assembled

troops in dramatic style, suddenly General Cambronne marched on to

the parade at the head of the Elba Six Hundred, with drums beating

and escorting the former Eagles of the Guard. Drawing up in line

ceremoniously, the “Elba Guard” halted before Napoleon, saluting and

dipping the Eagles forward. A frantic roar of enthusiastic cheering

greeted the salute of the Eagles.

Napoleon took instant advantage of the first pause as the cheering

subsided. Pointing to the veterans just arrived, and standing with

the Eagles ranged in front of them, held on high at arm’s-length by

their bearers, he again addressed the assembled troops. “They bring

back to you the Eagles which are to serve as your rallying-point.

In giving them to the Guard, I give them to the whole Army. Treason

and misfortune have cast over them a veil of mourning; but they now

reappear resplendent in their old glory. Swear to me, soldiers, that

these Eagles shall always be found where the welfare of the nation

calls them, and those who would invade our land again shall not be able

to endure their glance!” “We swear it! We swear it!” was the answer

that came back amid tumultuous shouts from every side.

[Sidenote: ONCE MORE THE FIELD OF MARS]

The Eagles restored by proclamation as the standards of the Army, and

the regiments reconstituted by their old numbers, to the unbounded

gratification of the soldiers everywhere, another Imperial proclamation

announced that Napoleon would once again personally distribute new

Eagles to the regiments. The ceremony of the Field of Mars of ten

years before would be repeated. The Emperor, with his own hand, would

present each Eagle to a regimental deputation, which would specially

attend in Paris to receive it. To give the utmost possible \_éclat\_ also

to the proceedings on the occasion, just as the former presentation

of the Eagles had been made an integral feature of the Coronation

celebration, so now the forthcoming distribution would take place at

the same time that Napoleon renewed his Imperial oath of fidelity to

the Constitution, as reshaped by the “\_Acte Additionel\_,” which had

been drafted to comply with the political exigencies of the moment.

The date provisionally fixed was towards the end of May. By that

time the returns of the \_Plébiscite\_ voting, to authorise the

re-establishment of the Empire, would be known. The historic event

takes its name of the “\_Champ de Mai\_” from the date proposed for it,

although, in actual fact, the ceremony took place on June 1. The place

appointed was where the former distribution of the Eagles had been

made, the Field of Mars, the wide open space in front of the Military

School, and the display was to be on no less grandiose scale than its

predecessor.

Immense wooden stands were erected all round the Field of Mars, with

tiers of benches, to seat, it was calculated, as many as two hundred

thousand people. In front of the Military School was set up an Imperial

throne, under a canopy of crimson silk, and elevated on a gorgeously

decorated platform. Napoleon was to take his new Imperial oath from

the throne, and thereupon formally attach his signature to the “\_Acte

Additionel\_.” There was to be a religious service also, and for that an

altar was erected at one side of the throne, raised on steps and draped

in red damask, picked out with gold. The balconies and stands all

round were draped and hung with tricolor flags, festooned amid gilded

Eagles, and heraldic insignia, and emblematic figures meant to typify

the prosperity and glory awaiting France under the returned Imperial

\_régime\_. As on the previous occasion, all the celebrities of France

were invited, and had their allotted places on the stands nearest the

throne. As before, too, the central arena was packed with a dense array

of troops; the deputations called up to receive the Eagles, the massed

battalions of the Imperial Guard, and detachments of all the regiments

of the garrison of Paris. It was a radiantly fine summer’s day, and the

display offered a spectacle of surpassing brilliance. Says one of the

officers: “The sun flashing on 50,000 bayonets seemed to make the vast

space sparkle!”

A hundred cannon fired from the Esplanade of the Invalides ushered in

the day of the “\_Champ de Mai\_.” Again, at ten o’clock, the artillery

thundered forth as Napoleon quitted the Tuileries in State to take

his way to the Field of Mars, “amid prodigious crowds of spectators

applauding enthusiastically,” along the Champs Elysées and across the

Pont d’Jéna.

[Sidenote: NINE MARSHALS TAKE PART]

Nine of the marshals who had cast in their lot with the returned

Emperor rode on either side of Napoleon’s coach: Davout, Minister of

War, who had not yet sworn allegiance to the Bourbons; Soult, the newly

appointed Chief of the Staff of the Army; Serrurier, Governor of the

Invalides; Brune and Jourdan; Moncey and Mortier; Suchet and Grouchy.

Ney was absent; Napoleon had refused to see him. Ney’s widely reported

speech to Louis XVIII., that he would “bring the bandit to Paris in

an iron cage,” had not been forgiven. Murat was in disgrace for his

recent blundering move in Northern Italy, which had vitally affected

Napoleon’s plans. His desertion during the closing campaign, when

Napoleon was at bay after Leipsic, moreover, was beyond condonation.

Of others who had been at Napoleon’s side on the Field of Mars ten

years before, Lefebvre and Masséna professed to be too old and infirm

for service in the field, although Masséna was still nominally on

the Active List, and had been in command for King Louis at Toulon.

He was due in Paris to meet Napoleon, but his fidelity was more than

doubtful: “gorged with wealth, Masséna thought only of preserving it.”

Augereau kept in the background, Napoleon refusing to have more to do

with him. Berthier, on that very morning, was lying dead at Bamberg

in Bavaria; whether victim of an accident or suicide has never been

made clear. Lannes and Bessières were in their graves, fallen on the

field of battle. Bernadotte, King of Sweden, was actively on the side

of the enemy. Marmont, Oudinot, Macdonald, and Victor, marshals of

later creation, had left France in company with the Bourbon princes.

Old Kellerman and Perignon, “Honorary Marshals” of 1804, had not come

forward again, remaining in seclusion; nor had St. Cyr, “the man of

ice,” another marshal since the Field of Mars, who was staying at home

with studied indifference, “occupying himself on his estate with his

hay crops and playing the fiddle.”

[Sidenote: THE “MAN OF SEDAN” WAS THERE]

Napoleon was accompanied in the State coach by three of his

brothers--Lucien, Joseph, and Jerome. This time there was of course

no Empress present. Josephine was dead: Marie Louise was holding

back elsewhere. None of the Bonaparte princesses appeared in the

procession. The only one attending the “\_Champ de Mai\_” came as a

spectator: Hortense Beauharnais, the daughter of Josephine and wife

of Louis Bonaparte. She had gone on in advance to the Military School

and was seated among the exalted personages awaiting Napoleon there;

accompanied by her two boys (one the future Third Napoleon, the “Man of

Sedan”). She seemed most interested, as we are told, in the sketch-book

she brought with her to draw a picture of the scene.

Napoleon alighted in the First Court of the Military School, being

acclaimed on all sides as he made his appearance with vociferous shouts

of “Vive l’Empereur!” Preceded by palace grandees and Court officials,

who had alighted from their carriages in advance and formed up to

receive him, he entered the building and passed on through to take his

seat on the throne. “He had the air of being in pain and anxious,”

describes an onlooker. “He descended slowly from his carriage while a

hundred drums beat ‘\_Au Champ\_.’ Then, advancing quickly, returning

the salutes of the assemblage at either side with bows, he proceeded

to the throne, and sat down, gazing round at the people in their dense

masses as he did so. Jerome and Joseph seated themselves on the right;

Lucien on the left; all three clad in white satin with black velvet

hats with white plumes. Napoleon himself had on his Imperial mantle of

ermine and purple velvet embroidered with golden bees.”

For a time the thundering cannon salutes and acclamations of the people

that hailed Napoleon’s appearance on the daïs were deafening. Bowing

repeatedly on every side, he took his seat on the throne, while all

present stood and remained uncovered. The guns then ceased, the music

of the bands and the drummings and trumpetings of the battalions died

away into silence. On that the ceremony of the day opened with the

celebration of High Mass by the Archbishop of Tours.

The religious portion of the pageant, we are told, “seemed to arouse no

interest in Napoleon. His opera-glass wandered all the time over the

immense multitude before him.” His attention was not recalled until

the Mass was over, when the delegates from the Electoral College,

marshalled by the Master of the Ceremonies, ascended the platform, and

ranged themselves before the throne. A Deputy stepped forward, and

after deep obeisance, in a loud resonant voice read an address teeming

with sentiments of patriotic attachment and expressing inviolable

fidelity towards the Emperor personally. Napoleon seemed to listen with

interest, “marking his approbation with nods and smiles.” The Deputy

ceased speaking amidst rapturous applause, and then Arch-Chancellor

Cambacérès, resplendent in a gorgeous orange-yellow robe, stood forward

in front of Napoleon to notify officially the popular acceptance of the

new national Constitution. He declared the total of the votes given in

the \_Plébiscite\_ to show a clear million in favour of the restoration

of the Empire. There was a flourish of trumpets, and forthwith the

chief herald proclaimed that the “Additional Act to the Constitution of

the Empire” had been agreed to by the French people.

[Sidenote: NAPOLEON SIGNS THE ACT]

Again from all round thundered out an artillery salute, and the whole

assembly rose to their feet and cheered. A small gilded table was

brought forward and placed before Napoleon, who, the Arch-Chancellor

holding the parchment open, and Joseph Bonaparte presenting the pen,

publicly ratified the Act with his formal signature. The air resounded

once more with the cannon firing and noisy acclamations on all sides.

Napoleon rose, when at length the cheering ceased, to address the

assembly with one of his most impassioned dramatic harangues. “Emperor,

Consul, Soldier, I hold everything from the people! In prosperity and

in adversity; in the field, in the council; in power, in exile, France

has been the sole and constant object of my thoughts and actions!” So

he began. He closed in the same vein: “Frenchmen! my will is that of my

people; my rights are theirs; my honour, my glory, my happiness, can

never be separated from the honour, glory, and happiness of France!”

Again came the outburst of rapturous applause. It subsided, and the

Archbishop of Bourges, as Grand Almoner of the Empire, came forward.

Kneeling before Napoleon he presented the Book of the Gospels, on

which Napoleon solemnly took the Imperial Oath to observe the new

Constitution. There only remained for Arch-Chancellor Cambacérès and

the principal officers of State to take their oaths of allegiance to

the Constitution and the Emperor, and after that a solemn Te Deum

closed the political ceremony.

It was now the turn of the Eagles and the Army. The civilian personages

withdrew from the steps of the throne; the electoral deputations fell

back; leaving a clear open space in front. Immediately, as if by magic,

the Eagles suddenly appeared; long rows of them flashing and glittering

in the brilliant sunshine. They were brought forward in procession,

advancing in massed rows “resplendent and dazzling like gold.” Carnot,

Minister of the Interior, the “Organiser of Victory” of the Armies of

the Revolution, headed the procession, “clad in a Spanish white dress

of great magnificence,” carrying the First Eagle of the National Guard

of Paris. Next him came Marshal Davout, Minister of War, carrying

the Eagle of the 1st Regiment of the Line, and then Admiral Decrès,

Minister of Marine (as representing the French Navy), carrying the

Eagle of Napoleon’s 1st Regiment of Marines. General Count Friant (he

fell at Waterloo), as Colonel-in-Chief, bore the Eagle of the Imperial

Guard. Other officers of exalted rank bore other Eagles.

[Sidenote: SPRINGING FORWARD TO MEET THEM]

Napoleon’s demeanour, hitherto, for most of the time, formal and

apathetic, altered instantaneously at the appearance of the Eagles. “He

sprang from the throne, and, casting aside his purple mantle, rushed

forward to meet his Eagles”; amid a sudden hush that seemed to fall

over the whole assembly at the sight. Then the momentary silence was

broken. An enthusiastic shout went up as the Emperor, pressing forward

impetuously, as though electrified with sudden energy, took up his

station immediately in front of the array of soldiers, the \_élite\_ of

the veterans of the old Grand Army left alive, as they stood there

formed up in an immense phalanx. To the sound of martial music the

regimental deputations forthwith moved up and advanced to pass before

him. Napoleon, with a gesture of deep reverence, took each Eagle into

his own hands from the officer who had been carrying it, and then

delivered it with stately formality to its future regimental bearer as

the deputations in turn filed past him.

He had a word for the men of every corps as each set of ten officers

and men drew up before him. To some he said, glancing at the number of

their regiment on their shakos, “I remember you well. You are my old

companions of Italy!” or, “You are my comrades of Egypt!” and so on.

Others he reminded of past days of distinction. “You were with me at

Arcola!” he said to one group, or “at Rivoli!” “at Austerlitz!” “at

Friedland!” to others, as might be--his words, we are told, “inspiring

the men with deep emotion.” For each of the National Guard deputations

he had also their little speech. To one detachment for instance, as it

came up, he said: “You are my old companions from the Rhine; you have

been the foremost, the most courageous, the most unfortunate in our

disasters; but I remember all!”

The last Eagle presented, Napoleon called on the soldiers to take

the Army Oath of fidelity to the Standard, using his customary Eagle

oration formula.

“Soldiers of the National Guard of the Empire!” he began, “Soldiers of

my Imperial Guard! Soldiers of the Line on land and sea! I entrust to

your hands the Imperial Eagle! You swear here to defend it at the cost

of your life’s blood against the enemies of the nation. You swear that

it will always be your guiding sign, your rallying point!”

[Sidenote: AMIDST A TUMULT OF ENTHUSIASM]

Some of those nearest interrupted Napoleon with shouts of “We swear!”

He went on: “You swear never to acknowledge any other standard!” The

shouts of “We swear!” again broke in vociferously.

Napoleon again went on: “You, Soldiers of the National Guard of Paris,

swear never to permit the foreigner to desecrate again the capital of

the Great Nation! To your courage I commit it!” Cries of “We swear!”

repeated continuously amidst a tumult of clamour, once more burst forth.

Napoleon continued and concluded, turning to his favourite Pretorians:

“Soldiers of the Imperial Guard, swear to surpass yourselves in the

campaign which is now about to open, to die round your Eagles rather

than permit foreigners to dictate terms to your country!” He ceased

after that, and once again the air vibrated with shouts of “We swear!

We swear!” and ejaculations of “Vive l’Empereur!” from the soldiers and

the throng of onlookers cramming the stands around.[40]

The military \_finale\_ of the day was the march past of the assembled

troops before the Emperor, in slow time, headed by the Eagles. “Nothing

could have been more imposing,” says one of the spectators, “than

this concluding display in the magnificent pageant. Amid the crash

of military music, the blaze of martial decoration, the glitter of

innumerable arms, 50,000 men passed by. The immense concourse of

beholders, their prolonged shouts and cheers, the occasion, the Man,

the mighty events which hung in suspense, all concurred to excite

feelings and reflections which only such a scene could have produced.”

On the other hand, we have this from a colder critic of the scene: “The

display was without heart, and theatrical; the vows of the soldiers

were made without warmth. There was but little real enthusiasm: the

shouts were not those of future victors of another Austerlitz and

Wagram, and the Emperor knew it!” Which are we to believe?

According to Savary, who was close beside him, Napoleon, for his part,

was satisfied with the enthusiasm of the soldiers. “The Emperor left

the Field of Mars confident that he might rely on the sentiments then

manifested towards him, and from that moment his only care was to meet

the storm that was forming in Belgium.”

[Sidenote: ON THE REGIMENTAL PARADES]

The new Eagles left Paris that night with their escorts. Each, on its

arrival where its regiment was stationed, was received with elaborate

ceremony, and formally presented on parade to the assembled officers

and men; a religious service being held in addition in some cases, at

which all were sworn individually to give their lives in its defence.

This, for instance, is what took place with one regiment, the 22nd of

the Line, stationed with the advanced division of Grouchy’s Army Corps

on the Belgian frontier at Couvins, near Rocroy, in the Ardennes. “The

new Eagle,” describes one of the officers, “all fresh from the gilder’s

shop, was solemnly blessed in the church of Couvins; then each soldier,

touching it with his hand, swore individually to defend it to the

death. After the religious service the regiment formed in square, and

the colonel delivered an address, in which he recalled the old glories

of the 22nd of the Line, and expressed his conviction that the regiment

would worthily uphold the old-time fame of the corps in the coming

campaign. The glowing language was received with great emotion, and as

of happy augury for the future.”[41]

CHAPTER XIII

AT WATERLOO

“AVE CAESAR! MORITURI TE SALUTANT!”

The Eagles figure in four episodes in the story of Waterloo.

They had their part at the outset in that intensely dramatic display

on the morning of the battle, when, before the eyes of Wellington’s

soldiers, drawn up with muskets loaded and bayonets fixed, and guns

in position ready to open fire, Napoleon passed his army in review;

the last parade of the Last Army on the day of its last battle. Said

Napoleon himself afterwards, in words that are in keeping with the

resplendent spectacle: “The earth seemed proud to bear so many brave

men!” (“La terre paraissait orgueilleuse de porter tant de braves!”)

It was a little after nine in the morning that the Last Army of

Napoleon moved out from its bivouacs of the night before to take up

its station for the battle. This is how a British hussar, who was

looking on, describes the opening of the wonderful show: “Marching in

eleven columns they came up to the front and deployed with rapidity,

precision, and fine scenic effect. The drums beat, the bands played,

the trumpets sounded. The light troops in front pressed forward, and

the rattle of musketry was followed by the retreat of our horsemen and

foot soldiers. Light wreaths of smoke curled upwards into the misty

air, and through this thin veil the dense dark columns of the French

infantry and the gay and gleaming squadrons of French horse were seen

moving into their positions. Before them was the open valley, yet green

with the heavy crops; behind them dark fringes of wood, and a thick

curtain of dreary cloud.

“The French bands struck up so that we could distinctly hear them. Not

long after, the enemy’s skirmishers, backed by their supports, were

thrown out; extending as they advanced, they spread over the whole

space before them. Now and then they saluted our ears with well-known

music, the whistling of musket-balls. Their columns, preceded by

mounted officers to take up the alignments, soon began to appear; the

bayonets flashing over dark masses at different points, accompanied by

the rattling of drums and the clang of trumpets.

“They took post, their infantry in front, in two lines, 60 yards apart,

flanked by lancers with their fluttering flags. In rear of the centre

of the infantry wings were the cuirassiers, also in two lines. In

rear of the cuirassiers, on the right, the lancers and chasseurs of

the Imperial Guard, in their splendid but gaudy uniforms: the former

clad in scarlet; the latter, like hussars, in rifle-green, fur-trimmed

pelisse, gold lace, bearskin cap. In rear of the cuirassiers, on the

left, were the horse-grenadiers and dragoons of the Imperial Guard,

with their dazzling arms. Immediately in rear of the centre was the

reserve, composed of the 6th Corps, in columns; on the left, and on

the right of the Genappe road, were two divisions of light cavalry. In

rear of the whole was the infantry of the Imperial Guard in columns, a

dense dark mass, which, with the 6th Corps and cavalry, were flanked by

their numerous artillery. Nearly 72,000 men, and 246 guns, ranged with

matches lighted, gave an awful presage of the approaching conflict.”

[Sidenote: AS THEY MARCHED ON TO THE FIELD]

Napoleon rode out to watch them as they deployed into position. He took

his stand at the point where the columns reached the field and wheeled

off to right and left to form up in readiness for the signal that

should launch their massed ranks forward across the intervening valley

against the British position in front. Marshal Soult, Chief of the

General Staff, rode close behind Napoleon on one side; Marshal Ney, in

charge of the main attack that day, was on the other. In rear followed

in glittering array the cavalcade of staff officers, with, dragged

along after them, tied by a rope to a dragoon orderly, Napoleon’s

Waterloo guide, the innkeeper De Coster.

Hardly had Napoleon himself ever witnessed before the like of the

tremendous display of enthusiasm that greeted his presence on the

field on the morning of that final day. “The drums beat; the trumpets

sounded; the bands struck up ‘Veillons au salut de l’Empire.’ As they

passed Napoleon the standard-bearers drooped the Eagles; the cavalrymen

waved their sabres; the infantrymen held on high their shakos on their

bayonets. The roar of cheers dominated and drowned the beat of the

drums and the blare of the trumpets. The ‘\_Vive l’Empereurs!\_’ followed

with such vehemence and such rapidity that no commands could be heard.

And what rendered the scene all the more solemn, all the more moving,

was the fact that before us, a thousand paces away perhaps, we could

see distinctly the dull red line [“la ligne rouge sombre”] of the

English army.”

So one French officer (Captain Martin of the 45th of the Line)

describes. The shouts of “Vive l’Empereur!” says another, a veteran of

Count d’Erlon’s First Army Corps, “rose more vehemently, louder and

longer than I ever heard before, for our men were determined that they

should be heard among the brick-red lines which fringed the crest of

Mont Saint-Jean.”

It was for the Eagles the counterpart of the Day of the Field of Mars,

the culminating act of homage to Napoleon from the soldiers of the

Grand Army.

[Sidenote: HIS IN LIFE AND DEATH]

“The sight of him,” if we may use the words of Lamartine, “was for some

a recompense for their death, for others an incitement to victory! One

heart beat between these men and the Emperor. In such a moment they

shared the same soul and the same cause! When all is risked for one

man, it is in him his followers live and die. The army was Napoleon!

Never before was it so entirely Napoleon as now. He was repudiated by

Europe, and his army had adopted him with idolatry; it voluntarily

made itself the great martyr of his glory. At such a moment he must

have felt himself more than man, more than a sovereign. His subjects

only bowed to his power, Europe to his genius; but his army bent in

homage to the past, the present, and the future, and welcomed victory

or defeat, the throne or death with its chief. It was determined on

everything, even on the sacrifice of itself, to restore him his Empire,

or to render his last fall illustrious. Accomplices at Grenoble,

Pretorians at Paris, victims at Waterloo: such a sentiment in the

generals and officers of Napoleon had in it nothing that was not in

conformity with the habits and even the vices of humanity. His cause

was their cause, his crime their crime, his power their power, his

glory their glory. But the devotion of those 80,000 soldiers was more

virtuous, for it was more disinterested. Who would know their names?

Who would pay them for the shedding of their blood? The plain before

them would not even preserve their bones! To have inspired such a

devotion was the greatness of Napoleon; to evince it even to madness

was the greatness of his Army!”

[Sidenote: SOME WHO HAD MET BEFORE]

They knew, too, not a few of them, the stamp of men they were about

to meet. Never before that day, of course, had Napoleon met British

soldiers on the battlefield; but there were others present who had, and

a good many of them.

Many a French regiment at Waterloo had old scores of their own to

settle, past days to avenge. The 8th of the Line, the fate of whose

“Eagle with the Golden Wreath” at Barrosa has been recorded, were on

the field, and dipped their glittering new Eagle, received at the

“\_Champ de Mai\_,” in salute as they passed Napoleon that morning. So

too did the 82nd, whose former battalion Eagles from Martinique are

at Chelsea now; the 13th of the Line and the 51st, who lost their

regimental Eagles in the Retiro arsenal of Madrid; the 28th, who met

their fate, and lost their Eagle under the bullets of the British 28th

in the Pyrenees. Others were there who had fought against Wellington

in Spain, and, more fortunate, had preserved their Eagles. Among these

were the 47th, who on the battlefield at Barrosa lost and regained

their Eagle; and the 105th, mindful yet of their terrible Salamanca

experience of what dragoon swords in strong hands could do. The 105th

were destined, soldiers and Eagle alike, to undergo a fate more

fearful still, ere the sun should set that day.

Two of the regiments that paraded before Napoleon to meet the soldiers

of Wellington had met under fire the sailors of Nelson at Trafalgar:

the 2nd of the Line, now in Jerome Bonaparte’s division of Reille’s

Army Corps, and the 16th, serving with the Sixth Corps. A third

regiment, the 70th, which did duty as marines at Trafalgar, was with

Grouchy, not many miles away; as was the 22nd of the Line, whose

Eagle, taken at Salamanca, is at Chelsea Hospital, and the 34th, whose

drum-major’s staff is to this day a prized trophy of the British 34th

(now the First Battalion of the Border Regiment), won in Spain, when,

as it so befell, two regiments bearing the same number crossed bayonets

on the battlefield.[42]

The famous 84th of the Line were at Waterloo, with their proud legend,

“Un contre dix,” restored at the “\_Champ de Mai\_,” flaunting proudly

on their new silken flag as the Eagle bent in salute to Napoleon;

also, the hardly less widely renowned 46th, the corps of the First

Grenadier of France, La Tour d’Auvergne, whose name was called at the

head of the list at that morning’s roll-call and answered with the

customary answer, “Dead on the Field of Honour”; also, too, Napoleon’s

former-time favourite, the 75th, mindful still on that last day of

their glorious youth when “Le 75me arrive et bât l’ennemi”--a motto

that an earlier colonel of the corps had proposed once to replace on

the flag by “Veni, Vidi, Vici.”

The Old Guard paraded in their fighting kit, with, as usual, in their

knapsacks their full-dress uniforms, carried in readiness to be put on

for Napoleon’s triumphal entry into Brussels.

Drouet d’Erlon rode past at the head of the First Army Corps; Count of

the Empire in virtue of his rank as a general; once upon a time the

little son of the postmaster at Varennes, where Louis Seize and Marie

Antoinette so pitifully ended their attempted flight, harsh old Drouet,

ex-sergeant of Condé dragoons, from whom he inherited his talent for

soldiering. General Reille led past the Second Corps. He, curiously,

had had something of a naval past. He had hardly forgotten that other

battle-day morning, when he galloped on to the field of Austerlitz, and

reported himself to the Emperor as having come direct from Cadiz, put

ashore from the doomed French fleet of Admiral Villeneuve just a week

before it sailed to fight Trafalgar. Both Reille and his men, above

all others, were burning with excitement and eagerness that day to get

at the enemy. They had missed taking part either at Ligny or Quatre

Bras, through contradictory orders which had kept them marching and

counter-marching between the two battlefields; unable to reach either

in time. Smarting under the reproach that they had been useless in the

campaign, though the pick of the Line was in their ranks, the men one

and all were burning to retrieve their reputation.

Count Lobau--he took his name from the island in the Danube which

played so vital a part in the battle of Aspern--was at the head of the

Sixth Corps, the third of Napoleon’s grand divisions of the army at

Waterloo. Formerly General Mouton, Napoleon renamed him when he made

him a Count for his skill and heroism at Aspern. “Mon Mouton,” said

Napoleon of him once as he watched the general in action, “est un lion.”

[Sidenote: NAPOLEON IN HIGH SPIRITS]

Napoleon himself was in the highest spirits, full of pride and

confidence. In that mood had he announced his intention of holding the

review. There was no need to hurry, he said; Blücher and Wellington

had been driven apart. The parade would pass the time while waiting

for the soaked ground to get dry, and make it easier for the guns to

move from point to point. And there was also this. The spectacle would

have assuredly a disquieting effect on the Dutch and Belgians in

Wellington’s army. Many of the men in front of him had served with the

Eagles in former days: all stood nervously in awe, it was notorious, of

the mighty name and reputation of Napoleon. Hesitating, as some were

known to be, between their fears and their patriotism, the influence of

the imposing spectacle might well--believed Napoleon--turn the scale

and induce them to come over.

This was Napoleon’s plan for the battle, as outlined that morning to

his brother Jerome. First would be the general preparation for attack

by a tremendous cannonade all along the line from massed batteries.

On that, the two army corps of D’Erlon and Reille would advance

simultaneously and assault in front, supported by cavalry charges

of cuirassiers. Then, if the English had not yet been beaten, would

follow the final assault, the crushing blow that it would be impossible

to resist; to be delivered by the remaining army corps of Lobau and

the Young Guard, supported by the Middle Guard and the Old Guard. So

Napoleon planned to fight and win at Waterloo.

[Sidenote: “THE GAME IS WITH US”]

Of the ultimate issue of the day he flattered himself there could be

no two opinions. “At the last I have them, these English!” “(Enfin je

les tiens, ces Anglais!”) he exclaimed jubilantly as he reconnoitred

Wellington’s position in the early morning. At breakfast with the two

Marshals, Soult and Ney, he declared that the odds were 90 to 10 in his

favour. “Wellington,” he said to Ney, “has thrown the dice, and the

game is with us.”

He turned fiercely on Soult, who, knowing the mettle of the British

soldier from experience, had entreated him to recall Grouchy’s 30,000

men from watching the Prussians near Wavre.

“You think because Wellington has defeated you, that he must be a very

great general! I tell you he is a bad general, and the English are but

poor troops! This, for us, will only be an affair of a \_déjeuner\_--a

picnic!”

“I hope so,” was all that Soult said in reply.

At that moment Reille and General Foy, experienced Peninsular veterans

both, whose opinions should have had weight, were announced. Said

Reille, in reply to Napoleon’s asking what he thought: “If well placed,

as Wellington knows how to draw up his men, and if attacked in front,

the English infantry is invincible, by reason of its calm tenacity and

the superiority of its fire. Before coming to close quarters with the

bayonet we must expect to see half the assaulting troops out of action.”

Interposed Foy: “Wellington never shows his troops, but if he is

yonder, I must warn your Majesty that the English infantry in close

combat is the very devil!” (“L’infanterie Anglaise en duel c’est le

diable!”)

Napoleon lost his temper. With an exclamation of angry incredulity he

rose hastily from the breakfast table, and the party broke up.

He spent a great part of the day watching the battle from a little

mound, a short distance from the farm of Rossomme; mostly pacing to

and fro, his hands behind his back; at times violently taking snuff,

occasionally gesticulating excitedly. Near by was a kitchen table

from the farmhouse, covered with maps weighted down with stones, with

a chair placed on some straw, on which at intervals he rested. Soult

kept ever near at hand, and the staff remained a little in rear. It was

not until the afternoon was well advanced that Napoleon got again on

horseback.

As related by the guide De Coster in conversation with an English

questioner a few months after Waterloo, this is what passed:

“He had frequent communications with his aides de camp during the day?”

“Every moment.”

“And when they reported what was going on?”

“His orders were always ‘Avancez!’”

“Did he eat or drink during the day?”

“No!”

“Did he take snuff?”

“In abundance.”

“Did he talk much?”

“Never, except when he gave orders.”

“What was the general character of his countenance during the day?”

[Sidenote: WHEN THE LAST CHARGE FAILED]

“\_Riante!\_--till the last charge failed.”

“How did he look then?”

“\_Blanc-mort!\_”

“Did he say ‘\_Sauve qui peut\_’?”

“No! When he saw the English infantry rush forward, and the cavalry in

the intermediate spaces coming down the hill, he said: ‘\_A present il

est fini. Sauvons-nous!\_’”[43]

HOW WELLINGTON’S TROPHIES WERE WON

It was in Napoleon’s second grand attack that our two Waterloo

Eagle-trophies, the most famous spoils ever won by the British Army,

came into Wellington’s hands.

The first attack began about half-past eleven, when Reille’s corps, on

the French left, made its opening effort against Hougoumont. Intended

by Napoleon at the outset rather as a feint to mislead Wellington into

fixing his attention on that side, the stubborn defence of Hougoumont

involved the Second Corps in a struggle that kept it fully occupied for

the whole day; unable to take part or be of use elsewhere.

The second grand attack took place shortly after two in the afternoon,

when Marshal Ney made his tremendous onslaught with thirty-three

battalions of Drouet d’Erlon’s First Army Corps on the left-centre of

the British position, to the east of the Charleroi road, where Picton’s

men held the ground.

[Sidenote: A DARK OBJECT IN THE HAZE]

The launching of Ney’s attack just then came about as the result of

Napoleon’s sudden and disquieting discovery that the Prussians were

approaching. It was to have opened an hour earlier, but, because

of that, had been held back at the last moment. Napoleon, while

looking round with the idea that Grouchy’s troops might be in sight

in that quarter, made the discovery with his own eyes. Those round

him, indeed, at first doubted what the dark object--which appeared

in the hazy atmosphere like a shadow on the high ground near Mont

Saint-Lambert, some six miles off to the north-east--really was. Soult

at first could make out nothing; then he was positive it was a column

of troops--probably Grouchy’s. The staff, scanning the suspicious

neighbourhood with their telescopes, asserted that what the Emperor saw

was only a wood. The arrival of some hussars with a Prussian prisoner,

whom they had just captured while trying to get round with a despatch

from Bülow to Wellington to announce the approach of the Prussian

Fourth Corps, settled the question.

Napoleon paced backwards and forwards for a minute, taking pinches

of snuff incessantly. Then he ordered off his Light Cavalry to

reconnoitre; dictated to Soult an urgent message recalling Grouchy; and

sent off an aide de camp to tell Lobau to wheel the Sixth Corps to the

right, facing towards Saint-Lambert. After that he gave Ney orders to

open his attack.

Ney took in hand his work forthwith, and at once a terrific cannonade

opened. Eighty French field-guns, a third of Napoleon’s artillery on

the field, began firing together from the plateau in front of La Belle

Alliance; storming furiously with shot and shell to break down the

British resistance, and clear the way for the onset of the charging

columns. Without slackening an instant the guns thundered incessantly

for nearly an hour; getting back from the British artillery in reply a

fire that was at least as vigorous and no less effective.

[Sidenote: “EN AVANT!” “VIVE L’EMPEREUR!”]

Then Ney gave the word to advance.

Immediately the French infantry were on the move. They went forward

massed in four divisions; in four solid columns of from four to

five thousand men each, advancing \_en échelon\_ from the left, with

intervals between of about four hundred paces. Eight battalions made

up each column, except that of the second division, which had nine.

The battalions stood drawn up in lines, three deep, with a front of

two hundred files. They were packed closely, one behind the other;

with intervals between, from front to rear, of only five paces. So

closely were they wedged together, that there was barely room between

the battalions for the company officers. Two brigadiers, Quiot and

Bourgeois, led the left column, General Allix, their chief, being

elsewhere; General Donzelot, a keen soldier and universally popular as

the best hearted and most genial of good fellows, headed the second

column; Marcognet, a grim, hard-bitten veteran, a prime favourite with

Marshal Ney for his dogged determination in action, had the third;

General Durutte was in charge of the fourth, away to the right.

With their battalion-drums jauntily rattling out the \_pas de charge\_,

amid excited cries and loud exultant shouts of “En avant!” “Vive

l’Empereur!” the columns stepped off. Ahead of them raced forward at a

run swarming crowds of \_tirailleurs\_; extending fan-wise as they went,

spreading out widely across the front in skirmishing array. The four

massed columns surged quickly forward and over the edge of the plateau

down the slope on to the space of shallow valley between the armies.

As they did so, from the moment they crossed the crest-line and dipped

below, a fierce hurricane of fire beat in their faces. Round-shot and

shrapnel swept the columns through and through, tearing long bloody

lanes through the densely packed masses of men.

Marshal Ney accompanied the first column for some part of the way,

riding by the side of Drouet d’Erlon.

As they crossed the intervening ground below, the death-dealing

British guns fired down on them incessantly, but in spite of all, they

stoutheartedly moved forward, without checking their pace. It was

terribly toilsome work in places: now they had to plough laboriously

over sodden and slippery ground; now to trample their way through

cornfields with standing grain-crops nearly breast-high, or, where

trodden down, tangling round the men’s feet.

Quiot’s brigade turned off to attack La Haye Sainte, but the rest of

the division, Bourgeois’ men and the three other columns, held on their

way, moving in dense phalanxes of gleaming bayonets up the slopes.

The second column, Donzelot’s, reached the top a little in advance of

the others, and was met by Kempt’s brigade of Picton’s troops, which

charged it and forced it to yield ground.

A moment later Marcognet’s column reached the British line, coming up

over the crest of the hill immediately in front of Picton’s Highland

Brigade.

Received with a furious outburst of musketry from all along the

extended British line, Marcognet’s leading files were thrown into some

confusion by the hail of bullets. They were, however, veterans, and

though their ranks were shaken, they still pressed on, amid a tumult of

fierce cries and shouts of “Vive l’Empereur!” and the wild clash and

rattle of their drums.

But they got no farther. The British brigadier on the spot, Sir Dennis

Pack, called on the nearest Highland regiment, the 92nd, to charge them

with the bayonet. A moment after that, all unexpectedly, the cavalry of

the Union Brigade were on them.

[Sidenote: THE HIGHLANDERS DASH FORWARD]

The Highlanders dashed forward with exultant cheers and levelled

bayonets, taking the French volley that met them without firing back a

shot. They did not, however, get up to the French, nor actually cross

steel on steel. As the Highlanders got within a dozen yards the column

suddenly stopped short, and some of the men in front seemed suddenly

to be panic-stricken. A moment before all were madly yelling out:

“Forward!” “Victory!” Now they began to turn their backs in disorder.

It was not, though, at the sight of the bayonets. They had seen and

heard something else. The thundering beat of approaching horse-hoofs

shook the ground.

With a trampling turmoil of horse-hoofs the cavalrymen of the British

Union Brigade burst on the scene, galloping forward from their former

post in rear of Picton’s infantry. The Scots Greys were on the left;

the Inniskillings in the centre; the Royal Dragoons on the right.

Marcognet’s men heard their approach, and the next moment saw the

horsemen coming at them. The unexpected sight startled and staggered

them; and some of those in the front line gave way. The alarm spread

at once, as most of the rest realised what was approaching. The whole

column swayed to and fro violently. Then it lost cohesion and began to

roll back in mingled ranks down-hill.

A moment later the Greys were among them. “The smoke in which the head

of the French column was enshrouded had not cleared away when the Greys

dashed into the mass.

“Highlanders and Greys charged together, while shrill and wild from

the Highland ranks sounded the mountain pipe, mingled with shouts of

‘Scotland for ever!’” So an officer describes. The men of the 92nd

seized hold of the stirrup-leathers of the horsemen, and charged with

them. “All rushed forward, leaving none but the disabled in their

rear.”

[Illustration: WATERLOO

The Charge of the Union Brigade]

[Sidenote: A SHOUT OF “ATTENTION! CAVALRY!”]

“The dragoons,” describes Captain Siborne, “having the advantage of

the descent, appeared to mow down the mass, which, bending under the

pressure, quickly spread itself outwards in all directions. Yet in

that mass were many gallant spirits who could not be brought to yield

without a struggle; and these fought bravely to the death.”

Says some one on the French side: “We heard a shout of ‘Attention!

Cavalry!’ Almost at the same instant a crowd of red dragoons mounted on

grey horses swept down upon us like the wind. Those who had straggled

were cut to pieces without mercy. They did not fall upon our columns to

ride through and break us up--we were too deep and massive for that;

but they came down between the divisions, slashing right and left with

their sabres and spurring their horses into the flanks of the columns

to cut them in two. Though they did not succeed in this, they killed

great numbers and threw us into confusion.”

The foremost French battalion of Marcognet’s column was the 45th of

the Line, one of Napoleon’s favourite corps, recruited in the capital,

and always spoken of by him as “Mes braves Enfants de Paris.” Said he

of them indeed once, when pointing them out to the Russian Envoy at

the grand review of June 1810: “Mark those soldiers, Prince: that is

my 45th--my brave children of Paris! If ever cartridges are burned

between my brother the Emperor of Russia and me, I will show him the

efficiency of my 45th. It was they who stormed your Russian batteries

at Austerlitz. They are scamps [“des vauriens”] off duty, but lions

on campaign; you should see their dash, their intrepidity; above all,

their cheerfulness under fire!” Small men--“ideal voltigeurs” Napoleon

also called the 45th--they stood a poor chance against the stalwart

swordsmen of the Scots Greys.

[Illustration: THE FIGHT FOR THE STANDARD.

Sergeant Ewart of the Scots Greys taking the Eagle of the 45th at

Waterloo.

From the picture by R. Andsell, A.R.A., at Royal Hospital, Chelsea.]

It was they who were to yield up the first of our British

Eagle-trophies of Waterloo. The prize fell to a non-commissioned

officer of the Greys, Sergeant Charles Ewart, a Kilmarnock man, who

achieved the feat of taking it single-handed. Ewart, an athletic fellow

of splendid physique and herculean strength, six feet four in his

stockings, and a notable \_sabreur\_, was plunging through the struggling

press of infantry, slashing out to right and left, when he caught sight

of the Eagle of the 45th, with its gorgeous new silken flag, bearing

the glittering inscription in letters of gold--“Austerlitz, Jena,

Friedland, Essling, Wagram.” It was being hurried away to the rear for

safety in the middle of a small band of devoted men who surrounded

it, and were fighting hard with their bayonets to keep the British

off. Sergeant Ewart saw that and rode straight for the Eagle-bearer.

Parrying the bayonet-thrusts at him as he got up, he cut down the

French officer who carried the Eagle, and then had a fight with two

others. These, first one and then the other, were killed or disabled

by the sergeant, who in the end carried off the splendid trophy

triumphantly.

[Sidenote: HOW EWART TOOK THE EAGLE]

Ewart himself, in a letter to his father, tells his own story of the

taking of the Eagle:

“He and I had a hard contest for it. He thrust for my groin; I parried

it off and cut him through the head, after which I was attacked by one

of their lancers, who threw his lance at me, but missed the mark by my

throwing it off with my sword, at my right side. Then I cut him from

the chin upwards, which went through his teeth. Next I was attacked by

a foot-soldier, who, after firing at me, charged me with his bayonet;

but he very soon lost the combat, for I parried it and cut him down

through the head. That finished the contest for the Eagle.”

Napoleon was watching the progress of the fight through his glasses. He

witnessed the charge of the Scots Greys--unaware, of course, that it

was his pet “Enfants de Paris” who were undergoing their fate. “Qu’ils

sont terribles ces chevaux gris!” was the exclamation that, according

to the guide De Coster, fell from Napoleon’s lips at the sight. The

Greys cut his unlucky 45th to pieces, and had overthrown the rest of

Marcognet’s Division in three minutes. “In three minutes,” says a

British officer in the charge, “the column was totally overthrown and

numbers of them taken prisoners.”

Sabring their way through the remnants of the 45th, and leaving the

prisoners to be secured by the Highlanders, the Greys then charged the

supporting regiment, the 25th of the Line. These, “lost in amazement

at the suddenness and wildness of the charge and its terrific effect

on their comrades on the higher ground in front,” were caught in the

act of trying to form square. Some of them fired a few shots at the

dragoons, but the impetus of the first charge carried the Greys in

among them with a rush, driving in the foremost ranks and making the

rest of the column in rear roll back and break up. In panic and despair

they threw down their muskets and, according to a British officer,

“surrendered in crowds.” The Eagle of the 25th, however, was saved.

It was carried safely off the field, and is now one of the Napoleonic

relics at the Invalides.

Ewart was at once sent to Brussels with the trophy, and on his arrival

carried it through the crowded streets “amidst the acclamations of

thousands of spectators who saw it.” He was given an ensigncy in the

3rd Royal Veteran Battalion in recognition of his exploit. The sword he

used at Waterloo is now among the treasures of Chelsea Hospital, and

Ewart’s old regiment bears embroidered on its standard a French Eagle,

with the legend “Waterloo.”[44]

[Sidenote: THE CHARGE OF THE “ROYALS”]

Within a few moments of Sergeant Ewart capturing the Eagle of the 45th,

an officer of the Royal Dragoons, Captain A. K. Clark (afterwards Sir

A. K. Clark-Kennedy) took, also in hand-to-hand fight, the other Eagle

sent home by Wellington from Waterloo--that of the 105th of the Line,

the leading regiment of Bourgeois’ Brigade.

The Royals, on the right of the Union Brigade, came down on the French

left column. That, as yet, had had no enemy in front of it, and was

advancing with cheers and shouts of triumph across the crest-line of

the ridge. It overlapped and extended beyond the flank of what had been

Picton’s line, and so far had only been fired at from a distance by

artillery and part of the 95th. Suddenly the French were startled by

the apparition of a mass of cavalry quite near; coming on within eighty

or ninety yards of them--emerging from the battle-smoke at a gallop.

The sight took them completely by surprise. The loud shouts of

triumph stopped abruptly. “The head of the column,” describes one of

the Royals, “appeared to be seized with a panic, gave us a fire which

brought down about twenty men, went instantly about, and endeavoured

to regain the opposite side of the hedges.” They had just crossed the

Wavre road along the slope, about halfway up.

It was the men of one corps, the 105th of the Line, who so turned back.

They, of all in the regiments of Napoleon’s army, knew what it was to

be charged by cavalry. They had had one fearful experience of what

cold steel in strong hands could do, and wanted no second. They were

the same 105th whom Wellington’s Hanoverian Dragoons, in the pursuit

after Salamanca, had ridden down and slaughtered so mercilessly. Once

more the fearful fate was about to overtake them--was at hand, was on

them! In the ranks were many veterans who had served in the 105th in

Spain before 1814, and had rejoined on Napoleon’s return from Elba.

The slaughter after Salamanca was a grim and horrifying memory in the

regiment that every man shuddered to recall. It all came back vividly

to them now, as the flashing sabres of the Royal Dragoons burst into

view, making for them across the ridge. The whole regiment gave back

and broke, turning for help to the supporting 28th in rear.

But they were not able to reach their refuge in time. Without drawing

rein the Royals pressed home their charge. They were into the 105th in

a moment, cutting them down on all sides.

[Sidenote: HOW THE SECOND EAGLE WAS TAKEN]

In that \_mêlée\_ the Eagle of the 105th met its fate. Captain

Clark-Kennedy himself describes how that came about--how he came to

take the Eagle. He was in command of the centre squadron, leading

through the thick of the ill-fated infantrymen.

“I did not see the Eagle and Colour (for there were two Colours, but

only one with an Eagle) until we had been probably five or six minutes

engaged. It must, I should think, have been originally about the centre

of the column, and got uncovered from the change of direction. When I

first saw it, it was perhaps about forty yards to my left, and a little

in my front. The officer who carried it, and his companions, were

moving with their backs towards me, and endeavouring to force their way

through the crowd.

“I gave the order to my squadron, ‘Right shoulders forward! Attack the

Colour!’ leading direct on the point myself. On reaching it I ran my

sword into the officer’s right side, a little above the hip-joint. He

was a little to my left side, and he fell to that side, with the Eagle

across my horse’s head. I tried to catch it with my left hand, but

could only touch the fringe of the flag; and it is probable it would

have fallen to the ground, had it not been prevented by the neck of

Corporal Styles’ horse, who came close up on my left at the instant,

and against which it fell. Corporal Styles was standard-coverer: his

post was immediately behind me, and his duty to follow wherever I led.

“When I first saw the Eagle, I gave the order ‘Right shoulders forward!

Attack the Colour!’ and on running the officer through the body I

called out twice together, ‘Secure the Colour! Secure the Colour! It

belongs to me!’ This order was addressed to some men close to me, of

whom Corporal Styles was one.

“On taking up the Eagle I endeavoured to break the Eagle off the pole,

with the intention of putting it into the breast of my coat, but I

could not break it. Corporal Styles said, ‘Pray, sir, do not break it,’

on which I replied, ‘Very well. Carry it to the rear as fast as you

can. It belongs to me!’”

Taking hold of the Eagle, Corporal Styles turned away. He had a fight

to get through with it, and had, we are told, literally to cut his way

back to safety.

Captain Clark-Kennedy, who received two wounds and had two horses

killed under him, was given the C.B. He was granted later, as an

augmentation to his family arms, the representation of a Napoleonic

Eagle and flag; with for crest a “demi-dragoon holding a flag with an

Eagle on it.” Corporal Styles was appointed to an ensigncy in the West

India Regiment. The Royal Dragoons wear the device of a Napoleonic

Eagle as collar-badge, and bear an Eagle embroidered on their standard.

[Sidenote: WHERE ANOTHER FLAG WAS FOUND]

As with the 45th, so with the 105th--both battalions of each regiment

lost their colours; the regimental Eagle and the “fanion” of the second

battalion. The “fanion” of the 105th, described as “a dark blue silken

flag, with on it the words ‘105me Régiment d’Infanterie de Ligne,’”

came into British possession in a manner that is not clear. It was not

taken in fight by the Royals. Was it picked up on the field after the

battle by some cam