

War and Peace

Book Four, Part Two, Chapters 9-10

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WITH regard to military matters, Napoleon immediately on his entry into Moscow gave General Sébastiani strict orders to observe the movements of the Russian army, sent army corps out along the different roads, and charged Murat to find Kutuzov. Then he gave careful directions about the fortification of the Kremlin, and drew up a brilliant plan for a future campaign over the whole map of Russia.

With regard to diplomatic questions, Napoleon summoned Captain Yakovlev,* who had been robbed and was in rags and did not know how to get out of Moscow, minutely explained to him his whole policy and his magnanimity, and having written a letter to the Emperor Alexander in which he considered it his duty to inform his Friend and Brother that Rastopchin had managed affairs badly in Moscow, he dispatched Yakovlev to Petersburg.

Having similarly explained his views and his magnanimity to Tutolmin, he dispatched that old man also to Petersburg to negotiate.

With regard to legal matters, immediately after the fires he gave orders to find and execute the incendiaries. And the scoundrel Rastopchin was punished by an order to burn down his houses.

With regard to administrative matters, Moscow was granted a constitution. A municipality was established and the following announcement issued:

INHABITANTS OF MOSCOW!

Your misfortunes are cruel, but his Majesty the Emperor and King desires to arrest their course. Terrible examples have taught you how he punishes disobedience and crime. Strict measures have been taken to put an end to disorder and to re-establish public security. A paternal administration, chosen from among yourselves, will form your municipality or city government. It will take care of you, of your needs, and of your welfare. Its members will be distinguished by a red ribbon worn across the shoulder, and the mayor of the city will wear a white belt as well. But when not on duty they will only wear a red ribbon round the left arm.

The city police is established on its former footing, and better order already prevails in consequence of its activity. The government has appointed two commissaries-general, or chiefs of police, and twenty commissaries or captains of wards have been appointed to the different wards of the city. You will recognize them by the white ribbon they will wear on the left arm. Several churches of different denominations are open, and divine service is performed in them unhindered. Your fellow-citizens are returning every

day to their homes and orders have been given that they should find in them the help and protection due in this misfortune. These are the measures the government has adopted to re-establish order and relieve your condition. But to achieve this aim it is necessary that you should add your efforts and should, if possible, forget the misfortunes you have suffered, should entertain the hope of a less cruel fate, should be certain that inevitable and ignominious death awaits those who make any attempt on your persons or on what remains of your property, and finally that you should not doubt that these will be safeguarded, since such is the will of the greatest and most just of monarchs. Soldiers and citizens, of whatever nation you may be, re-establish public confidence, the source of the welfare of a state, live like brothers, render mutual aid and protection one to another, unite to defeat the intentions of the evil-minded, obey the military and civil authorities, and your tears will soon cease to flow!

With regard to supplies for the army, Napoleon decreed that all the troops in turn should enter Moscow *à la maraude*¹ to obtain provisions for themselves, so that the army might have its future provided for.

With regard to religion, Napoleon ordered *ramener les popes*² and services to be again performed in the churches.

With regard to commerce and to provisioning the army, the following was placarded everywhere:

PROCLAMATION

You, peaceful inhabitants of Moscow, artisans and workmen whom misfortune has driven from the city, and you scattered tillers of the soil, still kept out in the fields by groundless fear, listen! Tranquillity is returning to this capital and order is being restored in it. Your fellow-countrymen are emerging boldly from their hiding-places on finding that they are respected. Any violence to them or to their property is promptly punished. His Majesty the Emperor and King protects them, and considers no one among you his enemy except those who disobey his orders. He desires to end your misfortunes and restore you to your homes and families. Respond therefore to his benevolent intentions and come to us without fear. Inhabitants, return with confidence to your abodes! You will soon find means of satisfying your needs. Craftsmen and industrious artisans, return to your work, your houses, your shops, where the protection of guards awaits you! You shall receive proper pay for your work. And lastly you too, peasants, come from the forests where you are hiding in terror, return to your huts without fear, in full assurance that you will find protection! Markets are established in the city where peasants can bring their surplus supplies and the products of the soil. The government has taken the following steps to ensure freedom of sale for them: (1) From today, peasants, husbandmen, and those

¹ looting.

² to bring back the priests.

living in the neighbourhood of Moscow, may without any danger bring their supplies of all kinds to two appointed markets, of which one is on the Mokhovaya Street and the other at the Provision Market. (2) Such supplies will be bought from them at such prices as seller and buyer may agree on, and if a seller is unable to obtain a fair price he will be free to take his goods back to his village and no one may hinder him under any pretext. (3) Sunday and Wednesday of each week are appointed as the chief market-days, and to that end a sufficient number of troops will be stationed along the high roads on Tuesdays and Saturdays at such distances from the town as to protect the carts. (4) Similar measures will be taken that peasants with their carts and horses may meet with no hindrance on their return journey. (5) Steps will immediately be taken to re-establish ordinary trading.

Inhabitants of the city and villages, and you, working men and artisans, to whatever nation you belong, you are called on to carry out the paternal intentions of his Majesty the Emperor and King and to co-operate with him for the public welfare! Lay your respect and confidence at his feet and do not delay to unite with us!

With the object of raising the spirits of the troops and of the people, reviews were constantly held and rewards distributed. The Emperor rode through the streets to comfort the inhabitants, and despite his preoccupation with state affairs himself visited the theatres that were established by his order.

In regard to philanthropy, the greatest virtue of crowned heads, Napoleon also did all in his power. He caused the words *Maison de ma Mère*¹ to be inscribed on the charitable institutions, thereby combining tender filial affection with the majestic benevolence of a monarch. He visited the Foundling Hospital and, allowing the orphans saved by him to kiss his white hands, graciously conversed with Tutolmin. Then, as Thiers eloquently recounts, he ordered his soldiers to be paid in forged Russian money which he had prepared: '*Relevant l'emploi de ces moyens par un acte digne de lui et de l'armée Française, il fit distribuer des secours aux incendiés. Mais les vivres étant trop précieux pour être donnés à des étrangers la plupart ennemis, Napoléon aima mieux leur fournir de l'argent afin qu'ils se fournissent au dehors, et il leur fit distribuer des roubles papiers.*'²

With reference to army discipline, orders were continually being issued to inflict severe punishment for the non-performance of military duties and to suppress robbery.

¹ House of my Mother.

² 'Dignifying these measures by an act worthy of himself and of the French army, he let relief be distributed to those who had been burnt out. But as food was too precious to be given to foreigners, who were for the most part enemies, Napoleon preferred to supply them with money with which to purchase food from outside, and had paper rubles distributed to them.'

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BUT strange to say all these measures, efforts, and plans—which were not at all worse than others issued in similar circumstances—did not affect the essence of the matter but, like the hands of a clock detached from the mechanism, swung about in an arbitrary and aimless way without engaging the cogwheels.

With reference to the military side—the plan of campaign—that work of genius of which Thiers remarks that '*que son génie n'avait jamais rien imaginé de plus profound, de plus habile et de plus admirable*',¹ and enters into a polemic with M. Fain* to prove that this work of genius must be referred not to the 4th but to the 15th of October—that plan never was or could be executed, for it was quite out of touch with the facts of the case. The fortifying of the Kremlin, for which *la Mosquée* (as Napoleon termed the church of Basil the Blessed) was to have been razed to the ground, proved quite useless. The mining of the Kremlin only helped towards fulfilling Napoleon's wish that it should be blown up when he left Moscow—as a child wants the floor on which he has hurt himself to be beaten. The pursuit of the Russian army, about which Napoleon was so concerned, produced an unheard-of result. The French generals lost touch with the Russian army of sixty thousand men, and according to Thiers it was only eventually found, like a lost pin, by the skill and—apparently—the genius of Murat.

With reference to diplomacy, all Napoleon's arguments as to his magnanimity and justice, both to Tutolmin and to Yakovlev (whose chief concern was to obtain a greatcoat and a conveyance), proved useless: Alexander did not receive these envoys and did not reply to their embassy.

With regard to legal matters, after the execution of the supposed incendiaries, the rest of Moscow burnt down.

With regard to administrative matters, the establishment of a municipality did not stop the robberies and was only of use to certain people who formed part of that municipality and—under pretext of preserving order—looted Moscow or saved their own property from being looted.

With regard to religion, as to which in Egypt matters had so easily been settled by Napoleon's visit to a mosque, no results were achieved. Two or three priests who were found in Moscow did try to carry out

¹ 'his genius never devised anything more profound, more skilful, or more admirable'.

Napoleon's wish, but one of them was slapped in the face by a French soldier while conducting service, and a French official reported of another that: *'Le prêtre, que j'avais découvert et invité à recommencer à dire la messe, a nettoyé et fermé l'église. Cette nuit on est venu de nouveau enfoncer les portes, casser les cadenas, déchirer les livres et commettre d'autres désordres.'*¹

With reference to commerce, the proclamation to industrious workmen and to peasants evoked no response. There were no industrious workmen, and the peasants caught the commissaries who ventured too far out of town with the proclamation, and killed them.

As to the theatres for the entertainment of the people and the troops, these did not meet with success either. The theatres set up in the Kremlin and in Posnyakov's house were closed again at once, because the actors and actresses were robbed.

Even philanthropy did not have the desired effect. The genuine as well as the false paper-money which flooded Moscow lost its value. The French, collecting booty, cared only for gold. Not only was the paper-money which Napoleon so graciously distributed to the unfortunate valueless, but even silver lost its value in relation to gold.

But the most amazing example of the ineffectiveness of the orders given by the authorities at that time was Napoleon's attempt to stop the looting and re-establish discipline.

This is what the army authorities were reporting:

Looting continues in the city despite the decrees against it. Order is not yet restored and not a single merchant is carrying on trade in a lawful manner. The sutlers alone venture to trade, and they sell stolen goods.

*La partie de mon arrondissement continue à être en proie au pillage des soldats du 3 corps, qui, non contents d'arracher aux malheureux réfugiés dans ses souterrains le peu qui leur reste, ont même la férocité de les blesser à coups de sabre, comme j'en ai vu plusieurs exemples.*²

*Rien de nouveau outre que les soldats se permettent de voler et de piller. Le 9 octobre.*³

¹ 'The priest whom I found and invited to say Mass, cleaned and locked up the church. That night the doors were again broken open, the padlocks smashed, the books mutilated, and other disorders perpetrated.'

² 'The neighbourhood of my ward continues to be pillaged by soldiers of the 3rd Corps, who not satisfied with taking from the unfortunate inhabitants hiding in the cellars the little they have left, even have the ferocity to wound them with their sabres, as I have repeatedly witnessed.'

³ 'Nothing new, except that the soldiers are robbing and pillaging—9th October.'

*Le vol et le pillage continuent. Il y a une bande de voleurs dans notre district qu'il faudra faire arrêter par de fortes gardes. Le 11 octobre.*¹

The Emperor is extremely displeased that, despite the strict orders to stop pillage, parties of marauding Guards are continually seen returning to the Kremlin. Among the Old Guard disorder and pillage were renewed more violently than ever yesterday evening, last night, and today. The Emperor sees with regret that the picked soldiers appointed to guard his person, who should set an example of discipline, carry disobedience to such a point that they break into the cellars and stores containing army supplies. Others have disgraced themselves to the extent of disobeying sentinels and officers, and have abused and beaten them.

*Le grand maréchal du palais se plaint vivement [wrote the governor], que malgré les défenses réitérées, les soldats continuent à faire leurs besoins dans toutes les cours et même jusque sous les fenêtres de l'Empereur.*²

That army, like a herd of cattle run wild and trampling underfoot the provender which might have saved it from starvation, disintegrated and perished with each additional day it remained in Moscow. But it did not go away.

It began to run away only when suddenly seized by a panic caused by the capture of transport trains on the Smolensk road, and by the battle of Tarutino. The news of that battle of Tarutino, unexpectedly received by Napoleon at a review, evoked in him a desire to punish the Russians (Thiers says), and he issued the order for departure which the whole army was demanding.

Fleeing from Moscow the soldiers took with them everything they had stolen. Napoleon, too, carried away his own personal *trésor*, but on seeing the baggage-trains that impeded the army he was (Thiers says) horror-struck. And yet with his experience of war he did not order all the superfluous vehicles to be burnt, as he had done with those of a certain marshal when approaching Moscow. He gazed at the calèches and carriages in which soldiers were riding and remarked that it was a very good thing, as those vehicles could be used to carry provisions, the sick, and the wounded.

The plight of the whole army resembled that of a wounded animal which feels it is perishing and does not know what it is doing. To study the skilful tactics and aims of Napoleon and his army from the time it

¹ 'Robbery and pillaging continue. There is a band of thieves in our district who ought to be arrested by a strong force—11th October.'

² 'The Grand Marshal of the palace complains bitterly . . . that in spite of repeated orders the soldiers continue to commit nuisances in all the courtyards, and even under the very windows of the Emperor.'

entered Moscow till it was destroyed, is like studying the dying leaps and shudders of a mortally wounded animal. Very often a wounded animal, hearing a rustle, rushes straight at the hunter's gun, runs forward and back again, and hastens its own end. Napoleon, under pressure from his whole army, did the same thing. The rustle of the battle of Tarutino frightened the beast, and it rushed forward onto the hunter's gun, reached him, turned back, and finally—like any wild beast—ran back along the most disadvantageous and dangerous path, where the old scent was familiar.

During the whole of that period Napoleon, who seems to us to have been the leader of all those movements—as the figurehead of a ship may seem to a savage to guide the vessel—acted like a child who, holding a couple of strings inside a carriage, thinks he is driving it.