

## CHAPTER XXI

The Emperor rode to the square where, facing one another, a battalion of the Preobrazhénsk regiment stood on the right and a battalion of the French Guards in their bearskin caps on the left.

As the Tsar rode up to one flank of the battalions, which presented arms, another group of horsemen galloped up to the opposite flank, and at the head of them Rostóv recognized Napoleon. It could be no one else. He came at a gallop, wearing a small hat, a blue uniform open over a white vest, and the St. Andrew ribbon over his shoulder. He was riding a very fine thoroughbred gray Arab horse with a crimson gold-embroidered saddlecloth. On approaching Alexander he raised his hat, and as he did so, Rostóv, with his cavalryman's eye, could not help noticing that Napoleon did not sit well or firmly in the saddle. The battalions shouted "Hurrah!" and "Vive l'Empereur!" Napoleon said something to Alexander, and both Emperors dismounted and took each other's hands. Napoleon's face wore an unpleasant and artificial smile. Alexander was saying something affable to him.

In spite of the trampling of the French gendarmes' horses, which were pushing back the crowd, Rostóv kept his eyes on every movement of Alexander and Bonaparte. It struck him as a surprise that Alexander treated Bonaparte as an equal and that the latter was quite at ease with the Tsar, as if such relations with an Emperor were an everyday matter to him.

Alexander and Napoleon, with the long train of their suites, approached the right flank of the Preobrazhénsk battalion and came straight up to the crowd standing there. The crowd unexpectedly found itself so close to the Emperors that Rostóv, standing in the front row, was afraid he might be recognized.

"Sire, I ask your permission to present the Legion of Honor to the bravest of your soldiers," said a sharp, precise voice, articulating every letter.

This was said by the undersized Napoleon, looking up straight into Alexander's eyes. Alexander listened attentively to what was said to him and, bending his head, smiled pleasantly.

"To him who has borne himself most bravely in this last war," added Napoleon, accentuating each syllable, as with a composure and assurance exasperating to Rostóv, he ran his eyes over the Russian ranks drawn up before him, who all presented arms with their eyes fixed on their Emperor.

"Will Your Majesty allow me to consult the colonel?" said Alexander and took a few hasty steps toward Prince Kozlówski, the commander of the battalion.

Bonaparte meanwhile began taking the glove off his small white hand, tore it in doing so, and threw it away. An aide-de-camp behind him

rushed forward and picked it up.

“To whom shall it be given?” the Emperor Alexander asked Kozlówski, in Russian in a low voice.

“To whomever Your Majesty commands.”

The Emperor knit his brows with dissatisfaction and, glancing back, remarked:

“But we must give him an answer.”

Kozlówski scanned the ranks resolutely and included Rostów in his scrutiny.

“Can it be me?” thought Rostów.

“Lázarev!” the colonel called, with a frown, and Lázarev, the first soldier in the rank, stepped briskly forward.

“Where are you off to? Stop here!” voices whispered to Lázarev who did not know where to go. Lázarev stopped, casting a sidelong look at his colonel in alarm. His face twitched, as often happens to soldiers called before the ranks.

Napoleon slightly turned his head, and put his plump little hand out behind him as if to take something. The members of his suite, guessing at once what he wanted, moved about and whispered as they passed something from one to another, and a page—the same one Rostów had seen the previous evening at Borís’—ran forward and, bowing respectfully over the outstretched hand and not keeping it waiting a moment, laid in it an Order on a red ribbon. Napoleon, without looking, pressed two fingers together and the badge was between them. Then he approached Lázarev (who rolled his eyes and persistently gazed at his own monarch), looked round at the Emperor Alexander to imply that what he was now doing was done for the sake of his ally, and the small white hand holding the Order touched one of Lázarev’s buttons. It was as if Napoleon knew that it was only necessary for his hand to deign to touch that soldier’s breast for the soldier to be forever happy, rewarded, and distinguished from everyone else in the world. Napoleon merely laid the cross on Lázarev’s breast and, dropping his hand, turned toward Alexander as though sure that the cross would adhere there. And it really did.

Officious hands, Russian and French, immediately seized the cross and fastened it to the uniform. Lázarev glanced morosely at the little man with white hands who was doing something to him and, still standing motionless presenting arms, looked again straight into Alexander’s eyes, as if asking whether he should stand there, or go away, or do something else. But receiving no orders, he remained for some time in that rigid position.

The Emperors remounted and rode away. The Preobrazhénsk battalion, breaking rank, mingled with the French Guards and sat down at the tables

prepared for them.

Lázarev sat in the place of honor. Russian and French officers embraced him, congratulated him, and pressed his hands. Crowds of officers and civilians drew near merely to see him. A rumble of Russian and French voices and laughter filled the air round the tables in the square. Two officers with flushed faces, looking cheerful and happy, passed by Rostóv.

“What d’you think of the treat? All on silver plate,” one of them was saying. “Have you seen Lázarev?”

“I have.”

“Tomorrow, I hear, the Preobrazhénskis will give them a dinner.”

“Yes, but what luck for Lázarev! Twelve hundred francs’ pension for life.”

“Here’s a cap, lads!” shouted a Preobrazhénsk soldier, donning a shaggy French cap.

“It’s a fine thing! First-rate!”

“Have you heard the password?” asked one Guards’ officer of another. “The day before yesterday it was ‘Napoléon, France, bravoure’; yesterday, ‘Alexandre, Russie, grandeur.’ One day our Emperor gives it and next day Napoleon. Tomorrow our Emperor will send a St. George’s Cross to the bravest of the French Guards. It has to be done. He must respond in kind.”

Borís, too, with his friend Zhilínski, came to see the Preobrazhénsk banquet. On his way back, he noticed Rostóv standing by the corner of a house.

“Rostóv! How d’you do? We missed one another,” he said, and could not refrain from asking what was the matter, so strangely dismal and troubled was Rostóv’s face.

“Nothing, nothing,” replied Rostóv.

“You’ll call round?”

“Yes, I will.”

Rostóv stood at that corner for a long time, watching the feast from a distance. In his mind, a painful process was going on which he could not bring to a conclusion. Terrible doubts rose in his soul. Now he remembered Denísov with his changed expression, his submission, and the whole hospital, with arms and legs torn off and its dirt and disease. So vividly did he recall that hospital stench of dead flesh that he looked round to see where the smell came from. Next he thought of that self-satisfied Bonaparte, with his small white hand, who was now an Emperor, liked and respected by Alexander. Then why those severed

arms and legs and those dead men?... Then again he thought of Lázarev rewarded and Denísov punished and unpardoned. He caught himself harboring such strange thoughts that he was frightened.

The smell of the food the Preobrazhénkis were eating and a sense of hunger recalled him from these reflections; he had to get something to eat before going away. He went to a hotel he had noticed that morning. There he found so many people, among them officers who, like himself, had come in civilian clothes, that he had difficulty in getting a dinner. Two officers of his own division joined him. The conversation naturally turned on the peace. The officers, his comrades, like most of the army, were dissatisfied with the peace concluded after the battle of Friedland. They said that had we held out a little longer Napoleon would have been done for, as his troops had neither provisions nor ammunition. Nicholas ate and drank (chiefly the latter) in silence. He finished a couple of bottles of wine by himself. The process in his mind went on tormenting him without reaching a conclusion. He feared to give way to his thoughts, yet could not get rid of them. Suddenly, on one of the officers' saying that it was humiliating to look at the French, Rostóv began shouting with uncalled-for wrath, and therefore much to the surprise of the officers:

“How can you judge what's best?” he cried, the blood suddenly rushing to his face. “How can you judge the Emperor's actions? What right have we to argue? We cannot comprehend either the Emperor's aims or his actions!”

“But I never said a word about the Emperor!” said the officer, justifying himself, and unable to understand Rostóv's outburst, except on the supposition that he was drunk.

But Rostóv did not listen to him.

“We are not diplomatic officials, we are soldiers and nothing more,” he went on. “If we are ordered to die, we must die. If we're punished, it means that we have deserved it, it's not for us to judge. If the Emperor pleases to recognize Bonaparte as Emperor and to conclude an alliance with him, it means that that is the right thing to do. If once we begin judging and arguing about everything, nothing sacred will be left! That way we shall be saying there is no God—nothing!” shouted Nicholas, banging the table—very little to the point as it seemed to his listeners, but quite relevantly to the course of his own thoughts.

“Our business is to do our duty, to fight and not to think! That's all...” said he.

“And to drink,” said one of the officers, not wishing to quarrel.

“Yes, and to drink,” assented Nicholas. “Hullo there! Another bottle!” he shouted.

In 1808 the Emperor Alexander went to Erfurt for a fresh interview with the Emperor Napoleon, and in the upper circles of Petersburg there was

much talk of the grandeur of this important meeting.