

CHAPTER XIX

From the day when Pierre, after leaving the Rostóvs' with Natásha's grateful look fresh in his mind, had gazed at the comet that seemed to be fixed in the sky and felt that something new was appearing on his own horizon—from that day the problem of the vanity and uselessness of all earthly things, that had incessantly tormented him, no longer presented itself. That terrible question "Why?" "Wherefore?" which had come to him amid every occupation, was now replaced, not by another question or by a reply to the former question, but by her image. When he listened to, or himself took part in, trivial conversations, when he read or heard of human baseness or folly, he was not horrified as formerly, and did not ask himself why men struggled so about these things when all is so transient and incomprehensible—but he remembered her as he had last seen her, and all his doubts vanished—not because she had answered the questions that had haunted him, but because his conception of her transferred him instantly to another, a brighter, realm of spiritual activity in which no one could be justified or guilty—a realm of beauty and love which it was worth living for. Whatever worldly baseness presented itself to him, he said to himself:

"Well, supposing N. N. has swindled the country and the Tsar, and the country and the Tsar confer honors upon him, what does that matter? She smiled at me yesterday and asked me to come again, and I love her, and no one will ever know it." And his soul felt calm and peaceful.

Pierre still went into society, drank as much and led the same idle and dissipated life, because besides the hours he spent at the Rostóvs' there were other hours he had to spend somehow, and the habits and acquaintances he had made in Moscow formed a current that bore him along irresistibly. But latterly, when more and more disquieting reports came from the seat of war and Natásha's health began to improve and she no longer aroused in him the former feeling of careful pity, an ever-increasing restlessness, which he could not explain, took possession of him. He felt that the condition he was in could not continue long, that a catastrophe was coming which would change his whole life, and he impatiently sought everywhere for signs of that approaching catastrophe. One of his brother Masons had revealed to Pierre the following prophecy concerning Napoleon, drawn from the Revelation of St. John.

In chapter 13, verse 18, of the Apocalypse, it is said:

Here is wisdom. Let him that hath understanding count the number of the beast: for it is the number of a man; and his number is Six hundred threescore and six.

And in the fifth verse of the same chapter:

And there was given unto him a mouth speaking great things and blasphemies; and power was given unto him to continue forty and two months.

The French alphabet, written out with the same numerical values as the Hebrew, in which the first nine letters denote units and the others tens, will have the following significance:

a	b	c	d	e	f	g	h	i	k
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
l	m	n	o	p	q	r	s		
20	30	40	50	60	70	80	90		
t	u	v	w	x	y				
100	110	120	130	140	150				
	z								
	160								

Writing the words L'Empereur Napoléon in numbers, it appears that the sum of them is 666, and that Napoleon was therefore the beast foretold in the Apocalypse. Moreover, by applying the same system to the words quarante-deux, * which was the term allowed to the beast that "spoke great things and blasphemies," the same number 666 was obtained; from which it followed that the limit fixed for Napoleon's power had come in the year 1812 when the French emperor was forty-two. This prophecy pleased Pierre very much and he often asked himself what would put an end to the power of the beast, that is, of Napoleon, and tried by the same system of using letters as numbers and adding them up, to find an answer to the question that engrossed him. He wrote the words L'Empereur Alexandre, La nation russe and added up their numbers, but the sums were either more or less than 666. Once when making such calculations he wrote down his own name in French, Comte Pierre Besouhoff, but the sum of the numbers did not come right. Then he changed the spelling, substituting a z for the s and adding de and the article le, still without obtaining the desired result. Then it occurred to him: if the answer to the question were contained in his name, his nationality would also be given in the answer. So he wrote Le russe Besuhof and adding up the numbers got 671. This was only five too much, and five was represented by e, the very letter elided from the article le before the word Empereur. By omitting the e, though incorrectly, Pierre got the answer he sought. L'russe Besuhof made 666. This discovery excited him. How, or by what means, he was connected with the great event foretold in the Apocalypse he did not know, but he did not doubt that connection for a moment. His love for Natásha, Antichrist, Napoleon, the invasion, the comet, 666, L'Empereur Napoléon, and L'russe Besuhof—all this had to mature and culminate, to lift him out of that spellbound, petty sphere of Moscow habits in which he felt himself held captive and lead him to a great achievement and great happiness.

* Forty-two.

On the eve of the Sunday when the special prayer was read, Pierre had promised the Rostóvs to bring them, from Count Rostopchín whom he knew well, both the appeal to the people and the news from the army. In the morning, when he went to call at Rostopchín's he met there a courier fresh from the army, an acquaintance of his own, who often danced at Moscow balls.

“Do, please, for heaven’s sake, relieve me of something!” said the courier. “I have a sackful of letters to parents.”

Among these letters was one from Nicholas Rostóv to his father. Pierre took that letter, and Rostopchín also gave him the Emperor’s appeal to Moscow, which had just been printed, the last army orders, and his own most recent bulletin. Glancing through the army orders, Pierre found in one of them, in the lists of killed, wounded, and rewarded, the name of Nicholas Rostóv, awarded a St. George’s Cross of the Fourth Class for courage shown in the Ostróvna affair, and in the same order the name of Prince Andrew Bolkónski, appointed to the command of a regiment of Chasseurs. Though he did not want to remind the Rostóvs of Bolkónski, Pierre could not refrain from making them happy by the news of their son’s having received a decoration, so he sent that printed army order and Nicholas’ letter to the Rostóvs, keeping the appeal, the bulletin, and the other orders to take with him when he went to dinner.

His conversation with Count Rostopchín and the latter’s tone of anxious hurry, the meeting with the courier who talked casually of how badly things were going in the army, the rumors of the discovery of spies in Moscow and of a leaflet in circulation stating that Napoleon promised to be in both the Russian capitals by the autumn, and the talk of the Emperor’s being expected to arrive next day—all aroused with fresh force that feeling of agitation and expectation in Pierre which he had been conscious of ever since the appearance of the comet, and especially since the beginning of the war.

He had long been thinking of entering the army and would have done so had he not been hindered, first, by his membership of the Society of Freemasons to which he was bound by oath and which preached perpetual peace and the abolition of war, and secondly, by the fact that when he saw the great mass of Muscovites who had donned uniform and were talking patriotism, he somehow felt ashamed to take the step. But the chief reason for not carrying out his intention to enter the army lay in the vague idea that he was L’russe Besuhof who had the number of the beast, 666; that his part in the great affair of setting a limit to the power of the beast that spoke great and blasphemous things had been predestined from eternity, and that therefore he ought not to undertake anything, but wait for what was bound to come to pass.