

CHAPTER XVII

After the Emperor had left Moscow, life flowed on there in its usual course, and its course was so very usual that it was difficult to remember the recent days of patriotic elation and ardor, hard to believe that Russia was really in danger and that the members of the English Club were also sons of the Fatherland ready to sacrifice everything for it. The one thing that recalled the patriotic fervor everyone had displayed during the Emperor's stay was the call for contributions of men and money, a necessity that as soon as the promises had been made assumed a legal, official form and became unavoidable.

With the enemy's approach to Moscow, the Moscovites' view of their situation did not grow more serious but on the contrary became even more frivolous, as always happens with people who see a great danger approaching. At the approach of danger there are always two voices that speak with equal power in the human soul: one very reasonably tells a man to consider the nature of the danger and the means of escaping it; the other, still more reasonably, says that it is too depressing and painful to think of the danger, since it is not in man's power to foresee everything and avert the general course of events, and it is therefore better to disregard what is painful till it comes, and to think about what is pleasant. In solitude a man generally listens to the first voice, but in society to the second. So it was now with the inhabitants of Moscow. It was long since people had been as gay in Moscow as that year.

Rostopchín's broadsheets, headed by woodcuts of a drink shop, a potman, and a Moscow burgher called Karpúshka Chigírín, "who—having been a militiaman and having had rather too much at the pub—heard that Napoleon wished to come to Moscow, grew angry, abused the French in very bad language, came out of the drink shop, and, under the sign of the eagle, began to address the assembled people," were read and discussed, together with the latest of Vasíli Lvóvich Púshkin's bouts rimés.

In the corner room at the Club, members gathered to read these broadsheets, and some liked the way Karpúshka jeered at the French, saying: "They will swell up with Russian cabbage, burst with our buckwheat porridge, and choke themselves with cabbage soup. They are all dwarfs and one peasant woman will toss three of them with a hayfork." Others did not like that tone and said it was stupid and vulgar. It was said that Rostopchín had expelled all Frenchmen and even all foreigners from Moscow, and that there had been some spies and agents of Napoleon among them; but this was told chiefly to introduce Rostopchín's witty remark on that occasion. The foreigners were deported to Nízхни by boat, and Rostopchín had said to them in French: "Rentrez en vous-mêmes; entrez dans la barque, et n'en faites pas une barque de Charon." * There was talk of all the government offices having been already removed from Moscow, and to this Shinshín's witticism was added—that for that alone Moscow ought to be grateful to Napoleon. It was said that Mamónov's regiment would cost him eight hundred thousand rubles, and that Bezúkhov had spent even more on his, but that the best thing about Bezúkhov's action was that he himself was going to don a uniform and ride at the

head of his regiment without charging anything for the show.

* “Think it over; get into the barque, and take care not to make it a barque of Charon.”

“You don’t spare anyone,” said Julie Drubetskáya as she collected and pressed together a bunch of raveled lint with her thin, beringed fingers.

Julie was preparing to leave Moscow next day and was giving a farewell soiree.

“Bezúkhov est ridicule, but he is so kind and good-natured. What pleasure is there to be so caustique?”

“A forfeit!” cried a young man in militia uniform whom Julie called “mon chevalier,” and who was going with her to Nízhi.

In Julie’s set, as in many other circles in Moscow, it had been agreed that they would speak nothing but Russian and that those who made a slip and spoke French should pay fines to the Committee of Voluntary Contributions.

“Another forfeit for a Gallicism,” said a Russian writer who was present. “‘What pleasure is there to be’ is not Russian!”

“You spare no one,” continued Julie to the young man without heeding the author’s remark.

“For caustique—I am guilty and will pay, and I am prepared to pay again for the pleasure of telling you the truth. For Gallicisms I won’t be responsible,” she remarked, turning to the author: “I have neither the money nor the time, like Prince Galítsyn, to engage a master to teach me Russian!”

“Ah, here he is!” she added. “Quand on... No, no,” she said to the militia officer, “you won’t catch me. Speak of the sun and you see its rays!” and she smiled amiably at Pierre. “We were just talking of you,” she said with the facility in lying natural to a society woman. “We were saying that your regiment would be sure to be better than Mamónov’s.”

“Oh, don’t talk to me of my regiment,” replied Pierre, kissing his hostess’ hand and taking a seat beside her. “I am so sick of it.”

“You will, of course, command it yourself?” said Julie, directing a sly, sarcastic glance toward the militia officer.

The latter in Pierre’s presence had ceased to be caustic, and his face expressed perplexity as to what Julie’s smile might mean. In spite of his absent-mindedness and good nature, Pierre’s personality immediately checked any attempt to ridicule him to his face.

“No,” said Pierre, with a laughing glance at his big, stout body. “I

should make too good a target for the French, besides I am afraid I should hardly be able to climb onto a horse.”

Among those whom Julie’s guests happened to choose to gossip about were the Rostóvs.

“I hear that their affairs are in a very bad way,” said Julie. “And he is so unreasonable, the count himself I mean. The Razumóvskis wanted to buy his house and his estate near Moscow, but it drags on and on. He asks too much.”

“No, I think the sale will come off in a few days,” said someone. “Though it is madness to buy anything in Moscow now.”

“Why?” asked Julie. “You don’t think Moscow is in danger?”

“Then why are you leaving?”

“I? What a question! I am going because... well, because everyone is going: and besides—I am not Joan of Arc or an Amazon.”

“Well, of course, of course! Let me have some more strips of linen.”

“If he manages the business properly he will be able to pay off all his debts,” said the militia officer, speaking of Rostóv.

“A kindly old man but not up to much. And why do they stay on so long in Moscow? They meant to leave for the country long ago. Natalie is quite well again now, isn’t she?” Julie asked Pierre with a knowing smile.

“They are waiting for their younger son,” Pierre replied. “He joined Obolénski’s Cossacks and went to Bélaya Tsérkov where the regiment is being formed. But now they have had him transferred to my regiment and are expecting him every day. The count wanted to leave long ago, but the countess won’t on any account leave Moscow till her son returns.”

“I met them the day before yesterday at the Arkhárovs’. Natalie has recovered her looks and is brighter. She sang a song. How easily some people get over everything!”

“Get over what?” inquired Pierre, looking displeased.

Julie smiled.

“You know, Count, such knights as you are only found in Madame de Souza’s novels.”

“What knights? What do you mean?” demanded Pierre, blushing.

“Oh, come, my dear count! C’est la fable de tout Moscou. Je vous admire, ma parole d’honneur!” *

* “It is the talk of all Moscow. My word, I admire you!”

“Forfeit, forfeit!” cried the militia officer.

“All right, one can’t talk—how tiresome!”

“What is ‘the talk of all Moscow’?” Pierre asked angrily, rising to his feet.

“Come now, Count, you know!”

“I don’t know anything about it,” said Pierre.

“I know you were friendly with Natalie, and so... but I was always more friendly with Véra—that dear Véra.”

“No, madame!” Pierre continued in a tone of displeasure, “I have not taken on myself the role of Natalie Rostóva’s knight at all, and have not been to their house for nearly a month. But I cannot understand the cruelty...”

“Qui s’excuse s’accuse,” * said Julie, smiling and waving the lint triumphantly, and to have the last word she promptly changed the subject. “Do you know what I heard today? Poor Mary Bolkónskaya arrived in Moscow yesterday. Do you know that she has lost her father?”

* “Who excuses himself, accuses himself.”

“Really? Where is she? I should like very much to see her,” said Pierre.

“I spent the evening with her yesterday. She is going to their estate near Moscow either today or tomorrow morning, with her nephew.”

“Well, and how is she?” asked Pierre.

“She is well, but sad. But do you know who rescued her? It is quite a romance. Nicholas Rostóv! She was surrounded, and they wanted to kill her and had wounded some of her people. He rushed in and saved her....”

“Another romance,” said the militia officer. “Really, this general flight has been arranged to get all the old maids married off. Catiche is one and Princess Bolkónskaya another.”

“Do you know, I really believe she is un petit peu amoureuse du jeune homme.” *

* “A little bit in love with the young man.”

“Forfeit, forfeit, forfeit!”

“But how could one say that in Russian?”