

CHAPTER XXI

Pierre stepped out of his carriage and, passing the toiling militiamen, ascended the knoll from which, according to the doctor, the battlefield could be seen.

It was about eleven o'clock. The sun shone somewhat to the left and behind him and brightly lit up the enormous panorama which, rising like an amphitheater, extended before him in the clear rarefied atmosphere.

From above on the left, bisecting that amphitheater, wound the Smolénsk highroad, passing through a village with a white church some five hundred paces in front of the knoll and below it. This was Borodinó. Below the village the road crossed the river by a bridge and, winding down and up, rose higher and higher to the village of Valúevo visible about four miles away, where Napoleon was then stationed. Beyond Valúevo the road disappeared into a yellowing forest on the horizon. Far in the distance in that birch and fir forest to the right of the road, the cross and belfry of the Kolochá Monastery gleamed in the sun. Here and there over the whole of that blue expanse, to right and left of the forest and the road, smoking campfires could be seen and indefinite masses of troops—ours and the enemy's. The ground to the right—along the course of the Kolochá and Moskvá rivers—was broken and hilly. Between the hollows the villages of Bezúbova and Zakhárino showed in the distance. On the left the ground was more level; there were fields of grain, and the smoking ruins of Seměnovsk, which had been burned down, could be seen.

All that Pierre saw was so indefinite that neither the left nor the right side of the field fully satisfied his expectations. Nowhere could he see the battlefield he had expected to find, but only fields, meadows, troops, woods, the smoke of campfires, villages, mounds, and streams; and try as he would he could descry no military "position" in this place which teemed with life, nor could he even distinguish our troops from the enemy's.

"I must ask someone who knows," he thought, and addressed an officer who was looking with curiosity at his huge unmilitary figure.

"May I ask you," said Pierre, "what village that is in front?"

"Búrdino, isn't it?" said the officer, turning to his companion.

"Borodinó," the other corrected him.

The officer, evidently glad of an opportunity for a talk, moved up to Pierre.

"Are those our men there?" Pierre inquired.

"Yes, and there, further on, are the French," said the officer. "There they are, there... you can see them."

“Where? Where?” asked Pierre.

“One can see them with the naked eye... Why, there!”

The officer pointed with his hand to the smoke visible on the left beyond the river, and the same stern and serious expression that Pierre had noticed on many of the faces he had met came into his face.

“Ah, those are the French! And over there?...” Pierre pointed to a knoll on the left, near which some troops could be seen.

“Those are ours.”

“Ah, ours! And there?...” Pierre pointed to another knoll in the distance with a big tree on it, near a village that lay in a hollow where also some campfires were smoking and something black was visible.

“That’s his again,” said the officer. (It was the Shevárdino Redoubt.)
“It was ours yesterday, but now it is his.”

“Then how about our position?”

“Our position?” replied the officer with a smile of satisfaction. “I can tell you quite clearly, because I constructed nearly all our entrenchments. There, you see? There’s our center, at Borodinó, just there,” and he pointed to the village in front of them with the white church. “That’s where one crosses the Kolochá. You see down there where the rows of hay are lying in the hollow, there’s the bridge. That’s our center. Our right flank is over there”—he pointed sharply to the right, far away in the broken ground—“That’s where the Moskvá River is, and we have thrown up three redoubts there, very strong ones. The left flank...” here the officer paused. “Well, you see, that’s difficult to explain.... Yesterday our left flank was there at Shevárdino, you see, where the oak is, but now we have withdrawn our left wing—now it is over there, do you see that village and the smoke? That’s Seměnovsk, yes, there,” he pointed to Raévski’s knoll. “But the battle will hardly be there. His having moved his troops there is only a ruse; he will probably pass round to the right of the Moskvá. But wherever it may be, many a man will be missing tomorrow!” he remarked.

An elderly sergeant who had approached the officer while he was giving these explanations had waited in silence for him to finish speaking, but at this point, evidently not liking the officer’s remark, interrupted him.

“Gabions must be sent for,” said he sternly.

The officer appeared abashed, as though he understood that one might think of how many men would be missing tomorrow but ought not to speak of it.

“Well, send number three company again,” the officer replied hurriedly.

“And you, are you one of the doctors?”

“No, I’ve come on my own,” answered Pierre, and he went down the hill again, passing the militiamen.

“Oh, those damned fellows!” muttered the officer who followed him, holding his nose as he ran past the men at work.

“There they are... bringing her, coming... There they are... They’ll be here in a minute...” voices were suddenly heard saying; and officers, soldiers, and militiamen began running forward along the road.

A church procession was coming up the hill from Borodinó. First along the dusty road came the infantry in ranks, bareheaded and with arms reversed. From behind them came the sound of church singing.

Soldiers and militiamen ran bareheaded past Pierre toward the procession.

“They are bringing her, our Protectress!... The Iberian Mother of God!” someone cried.

“The Smolénsk Mother of God,” another corrected him.

The militiamen, both those who had been in the village and those who had been at work on the battery, threw down their spades and ran to meet the church procession. Following the battalion that marched along the dusty road came priests in their vestments—one little old man in a hood with attendants and singers. Behind them soldiers and officers bore a large, dark-faced icon with an embossed metal cover. This was the icon that had been brought from Smolénsk and had since accompanied the army. Behind, before, and on both sides, crowds of militiamen with bared heads walked, ran, and bowed to the ground.

At the summit of the hill they stopped with the icon; the men who had been holding it up by the linen bands attached to it were relieved by others, the chanters relit their censers, and service began. The hot rays of the sun beat down vertically and a fresh soft wind played with the hair of the bared heads and with the ribbons decorating the icon. The singing did not sound loud under the open sky. An immense crowd of bareheaded officers, soldiers, and militiamen surrounded the icon. Behind the priest and a chanter stood the notabilities on a spot reserved for them. A bald general with a St. George’s Cross on his neck stood just behind the priest’s back, and without crossing himself (he was evidently a German) patiently awaited the end of the service, which he considered it necessary to hear to the end, probably to arouse the patriotism of the Russian people. Another general stood in a martial pose, crossing himself by shaking his hand in front of his chest while looking about him. Standing among the crowd of peasants, Pierre recognized several acquaintances among these notables, but did not look at them—his whole attention was absorbed in watching the serious expression on the faces of the crowd of soldiers and militiamen who were all gazing eagerly at the icon. As soon as the tired chanters, who were singing the service for the twentieth time that day, began lazily and mechanically to sing: “Save from calamity Thy servants, O Mother of

God,” and the priest and deacon chimed in: “For to Thee under God we all flee as to an inviolable bulwark and protection,” there again kindled in all those faces the same expression of consciousness of the solemnity of the impending moment that Pierre had seen on the faces at the foot of the hill at Mozháysk and momentarily on many and many faces he had met that morning; and heads were bowed more frequently and hair tossed back, and sighs and the sound men made as they crossed themselves were heard.

The crowd round the icon suddenly parted and pressed against Pierre. Someone, a very important personage judging by the haste with which way was made for him, was approaching the icon.

It was Kutúzov, who had been riding round the position and on his way back to Tatárinova had stopped where the service was being held. Pierre recognized him at once by his peculiar figure, which distinguished him from everybody else.

With a long overcoat on his exceedingly stout, round-shouldered body, with uncovered white head and puffy face showing the white ball of the eye he had lost, Kutúzov walked with plunging, swaying gait into the crowd and stopped behind the priest. He crossed himself with an accustomed movement, bent till he touched the ground with his hand, and bowed his white head with a deep sigh. Behind Kutúzov was Bennigsen and the suite. Despite the presence of the commander in chief, who attracted the attention of all the superior officers, the militiamen and soldiers continued their prayers without looking at him.

When the service was over, Kutúzov stepped up to the icon, sank heavily to his knees, bowed to the ground, and for a long time tried vainly to rise, but could not do so on account of his weakness and weight. His white head twitched with the effort. At last he rose, kissed the icon as a child does with naïvely pouting lips, and again bowed till he touched the ground with his hand. The other generals followed his example, then the officers, and after them with excited faces, pressing on one another, crowding, panting, and pushing, scrambled the soldiers and militiamen.