

### CHAPTER III

The Russian army was commanded by Kutúzov and his staff, and also by the Emperor from Petersburg. Before the news of the abandonment of Moscow had been received in Petersburg, a detailed plan of the whole campaign had been drawn up and sent to Kutúzov for his guidance. Though this plan had been drawn up on the supposition that Moscow was still in our hands, it was approved by the staff and accepted as a basis for action.

Kutúzov only replied that movements arranged from a distance were always difficult to execute. So fresh instructions were sent for the solution of difficulties that might be encountered, as well as fresh people who were to watch Kutúzov's actions and report upon them.

Besides this, the whole staff of the Russian army was now reorganized. The posts left vacant by Bagration, who had been killed, and by Barclay, who had gone away in dudgeon, had to be filled. Very serious consideration was given to the question whether it would be better to put A in B's place and B in D's, or on the contrary to put D in A's place, and so on—as if anything more than A's or B's satisfaction depended on this.

As a result of the hostility between Kutúzov and Bennigsen, his Chief of Staff, the presence of confidential representatives of the Emperor, and these transfers, a more than usually complicated play of parties was going on among the staff of the army. A was undermining B, D was undermining C, and so on in all possible combinations and permutations. In all these plottings the subject of intrigue was generally the conduct of the war, which all these men believed they were directing; but this affair of the war went on independently of them, as it had to go: that is, never in the way people devised, but flowing always from the essential attitude of the masses. Only in the highest spheres did all these schemes, crossings, and interminglings appear to be a true reflection of what had to happen.

Prince Michael Ilarionovich! (wrote the Emperor on the second of October in a letter that reached Kutúzov after the battle at Tarútino) Since September 2 Moscow has been in the hands of the enemy. Your last reports were written on the twentieth, and during all this time not only has no action been taken against the enemy or for the relief of the ancient capital, but according to your last report you have even retreated farther. Sérpukhov is already occupied by an enemy detachment and Túla with its famous arsenal, so indispensable to the army, is in danger. From General Wintzingerode's reports, I see that an enemy corps of ten thousand men is moving on the Petersburg road. Another corps of several thousand men is moving on Dmítrov. A third has advanced along the Vladímir road, and a fourth, rather considerable detachment is stationed between Rúza and Mozháysk. Napoleon himself was in Moscow as late as the twenty-fifth. In view of all this information, when the enemy has scattered his forces in large detachments, and with Napoleon and his Guards in Moscow, is it possible that the enemy's forces confronting you are so considerable as not to allow of your taking the offensive? On the contrary, he is probably pursuing you with detachments, or at most with

an army corps much weaker than the army entrusted to you. It would seem that, availing yourself of these circumstances, you might advantageously attack a weaker one and annihilate him, or at least oblige him to retreat, retaining in our hands an important part of the provinces now occupied by the enemy, and thereby averting danger from Túla and other towns in the interior. You will be responsible if the enemy is able to direct a force of any size against Petersburg to threaten this capital in which it has not been possible to retain many troops; for with the army entrusted to you, and acting with resolution and energy, you have ample means to avert this fresh calamity. Remember that you have still to answer to our offended country for the loss of Moscow. You have experienced my readiness to reward you. That readiness will not weaken in me, but I and Russia have a right to expect from you all the zeal, firmness, and success which your intellect, military talent, and the courage of the troops you command justify us in expecting.

But by the time this letter, which proved that the real relation of the forces had already made itself felt in Petersburg, was dispatched, Kutúzov had found himself unable any longer to restrain the army he commanded from attacking and a battle had taken place.

On the second of October a Cossack, Shapoválov, who was out scouting, killed one hare and wounded another. Following the wounded hare he made his way far into the forest and came upon the left flank of Murat's army, encamped there without any precautions. The Cossack laughingly told his comrades how he had almost fallen into the hands of the French. A cornet, hearing the story, informed his commander.

The Cossack was sent for and questioned. The Cossack officers wished to take advantage of this chance to capture some horses, but one of the superior officers, who was acquainted with the higher authorities, reported the incident to a general on the staff. The state of things on the staff had of late been exceedingly strained. Ermólov had been to see Bennigsen a few days previously and had entreated him to use his influence with the commander in chief to induce him to take the offensive.

“If I did not know you I should think you did not want what you are asking for. I need only advise anything and his Highness is sure to do the opposite,” replied Bennigsen.

The Cossack's report, confirmed by horse patrols who were sent out, was the final proof that events had matured. The tightly coiled spring was released, the clock began to whirr and the chimes to play. Despite all his supposed power, his intellect, his experience, and his knowledge of men, Kutúzov—having taken into consideration the Cossack's report, a note from Bennigsen who sent personal reports to the Emperor, the wishes he supposed the Emperor to hold, and the fact that all the generals expressed the same wish—could no longer check the inevitable movement, and gave the order to do what he regarded as useless and harmful—gave his approval, that is, to the accomplished fact.