CHAPTER V

In 1812 and 1813 Kutúzov was openly accused of blundering. The Emperor was dissatisfied with him. And in a history recently written by order of the Highest Authorities it is said that Kutúzov was a cunning court liar, frightened of the name of Napoleon, and that by his blunders at Krásnoe and the Berëzina he deprived the Russian army of the glory of complete victory over the French. *

> * History of the year 1812. The character of Kutúzov and reflections on the unsatisfactory results of the battles at Krásnoe, by Bogdánovich.

Such is the fate not of great men (grands hommes) whom the Russian mind does not acknowledge, but of those rare and always solitary individuals who, discerning the will of Providence, submit their personal will to it. The hatred and contempt of the crowd punish such men for discerning the higher laws.

For Russian historians, strange and terrible to say, Napoleon—that most insignificant tool of history who never anywhere, even in exile, showed human dignity—Napoleon is the object of adulation and enthusiasm; he is grand. But Kutúzov—the man who from the beginning to the end of his activity in 1812, never once swerving by word or deed from Borodinó to Vílna, presented an example exceptional in history of self-sacrifice and a present consciousness of the future importance of what was happening—Kutúzov seems to them something indefinite and pitiful, and when speaking of him and of the year 1812 they always seem a little ashamed.

And yet it is difficult to imagine an historical character whose activity was so unswervingly directed to a single aim; and it would be difficult to imagine any aim more worthy or more consonant with the will of the whole people. Still more difficult would it be to find an instance in history of the aim of an historical personage being so completely accomplished as that to which all Kutúzov's efforts were directed in 1812.

Kutúzov never talked of "forty centuries looking down from the Pyramids," of the sacrifices he offered for the fatherland, or of what he intended to accomplish or had accomplished; in general he said nothing about himself, adopted no pose, always appeared to be the simplest and most ordinary of men, and said the simplest and most ordinary things. He wrote letters to his daughters and to Madame de Staël, read novels, liked the society of pretty women, jested with generals, officers, and soldiers, and never contradicted those who tried to prove anything to him. When Count Rostopchín at the Yaúza bridge galloped up to Kutúzov with personal reproaches for having caused the destruction of Moscow, and said: "How was it you promised not to abandon Moscow without a battle?" Kutúzov replied: "And I shall not abandon Moscow without a battle," though Moscow was then already abandoned. When Arakchéev, coming to him from the Emperor, said that Ermólov ought to be appointed chief of the artillery, Kutúzov replied: "Yes, I was

just saying so myself," though a moment before he had said quite the contrary. What did it matter to him—who then alone amid a senseless crowd understood the whole tremendous significance of what was happening—what did it matter to him whether Rostopchín attributed the calamities of Moscow to him or to himself? Still less could it matter to him who was appointed chief of the artillery.

Not merely in these cases but continually did that old man—who by experience of life had reached the conviction that thoughts and the words serving as their expression are not what move people—use quite meaningless words that happened to enter his head.

But that man, so heedless of his words, did not once during the whole time of his activity utter one word inconsistent with the single aim toward which he moved throughout the whole war. Obviously in spite of himself, in very diverse circumstances, he repeatedly expressed his real thoughts with the bitter conviction that he would not be understood. Beginning with the battle of Borodinó, from which time his disagreement with those about him began, he alone said that the battle of Borodinó was a victory, and repeated this both verbally and in his dispatches and reports up to the time of his death. He alone said that the loss of Moscow is not the loss of Russia. In reply to Lauriston's proposal of peace, he said: There can be no peace, for such is the people's will. He alone during the retreat of the French said that all our maneuvers are useless, everything is being accomplished of itself better than we could desire; that the enemy must be offered "a golden bridge"; that neither the Tarútino, the Vyázma, nor the Krásnoe battles were necessary; that we must keep some force to reach the frontier with, and that he would not sacrifice a single Russian for ten Frenchmen.

And this courtier, as he is described to us, who lies to Arakchéev to please the Emperor, he alone—incurring thereby the Emperor's displeasure—said in Vílna that to carry the war beyond the frontier is useless and harmful.

Nor do words alone prove that only he understood the meaning of the events. His actions—without the smallest deviation—were all directed to one and the same threefold end: (1) to brace all his strength for conflict with the French, (2) to defeat them, and (3) to drive them out of Russia, minimizing as far as possible the sufferings of our people and of our army.

This procrastinator Kutúzov, whose motto was "Patience and Time," this enemy of decisive action, gave battle at Borodinó, investing the preparations for it with unparalleled solemnity. This Kutúzov who before the battle of Austerlitz began said that it would be lost, he alone, in contradiction to everyone else, declared till his death that Borodinó was a victory, despite the assurance of generals that the battle was lost and despite the fact that for an army to have to retire after winning a battle was unprecedented. He alone during the whole retreat insisted that battles, which were useless then, should not be fought, and that a new war should not be begun nor the frontiers of Russia crossed.

It is easy now to understand the significance of these events—if only we abstain from attributing to the activity of the mass aims that existed only in the heads of a dozen individuals—for the events and results now lie before us.

But how did that old man, alone, in opposition to the general opinion, so truly discern the importance of the people's view of the events that in all his activity he was never once untrue to it?

The source of that extraordinary power of penetrating the meaning of the events then occuring lay in the national feeling which he possessed in full purity and strength.

Only the recognition of the fact that he possessed this feeling caused the people in so strange a manner, contrary to the Tsar's wish, to select him—an old man in disfavor—to be their representative in the national war. And only that feeling placed him on that highest human pedestal from which he, the commander in chief, devoted all his powers not to slaying and destroying men but to saving and showing pity on them.

That simple, modest, and therefore truly great, figure could not be cast in the false mold of a European hero—the supposed ruler of men—that history has invented.

To a lackey no man can be great, for a lackey has his own conception of greatness.