FRENCH EMPIRE.
Uniforms decreed in February 1812.
CARABINIER OF LIGHT INFANTRY. -- LIGHT HORSE, 5th REGIMENT.
CHAPTER II

PARIS, LONDON AND SAINT-PETERSBURG, AT THE BEGINNING OF THE YEAR 1812.

State of public opinion in France at the time of Napoleon's marriage and after the birth of the King of Rome. -The court, the upper bourgeoisie and the people. -Commercial malaise in 1812: its causes. -The Continental System, incessant thought of Napoleon. -State of England. -Troubles and disorders in London. -Great Britain is approaching its ruin. -Napoleon's hopes about to be realized. -Immense sacrifices made by Napoleon to aid the commerce of Paris. -Industry awards and incentives. -Improvement in the situation of Spain. -St. Petersburg: complaints from merchants. -England addresses Russia to save herself from the peril which threatens her. -Clever policy of Alexander. -The Crown Prince of Sweden (Bernadotte): his wounded vanity made him seek the alliance of Russia. -Spirit of the Russian population. -The clergy and the lords. -Their hatred for France, their contempt for Napoleon. -Sermons in the churches of St. Petersburg and Moscow. -Motion of the Russian nation to march against us. -Napoleon misunderstands the principle which he himself had proclaimed ten years before.

After Napoleon's marriage to an Archduchess of Austria, and especially after the birth of this child whom the Emperor was the first to salute with the title of King of Rome, the intoxication of the French people had been universally great. It seemed that the peace of Europe should be cemented around this cradle of purple and gold! Napoleon, father of a family, was to concentrate his affections on the heir of his dynasty, the object of his tenderness, the hope of his ambition. Society tended to become even more civilized: there was, in Paris, a brilliant court and fixed etiquette; parties, presentations, small and large gatherings. The eyes of the Emperor were studied, the slightest desires of the Empress were immediately satisfied; they occupied themselves, in the palace as in the city, with the smallest anecdotes about the King of Rome; we liked to see him play with his glorious father, we loved to see the eagle grow under his powerful wings; the fits of anger of the little king, as the Emperor called him, his caprices, all were noticed as hopes of greatness and of the future; finally, in memory of Roland's war song, they repeated: "that this child would be proud and haughty, strong and imperious;" and Napoleon smiled at the hope of seeing, in this beloved son, the male and warlike successor of his double crown.

The ideas, forms, tastes of the old monarchy were the order of the day at the Tuileries. The women spoke only of chivalry, nobility and gallantries. Around these beautiful duchesses fluttered serious diplomats, young auditors to the Council of State and a crowd of general officers, for the most part counts or barons, with their hearts always burning, under horses bleached in the Egyptian sun or under the snows of Poland.
The upper bourgeoisie remained outside this new aristocracy, sometimes haughty and often exacting, because there was already a well-defined line of demarcation between the two castes; but in the salons, in the interior of the families, people danced, they played proverbs; they sang, *Le Troubadour*, or else, *Charming Portrait*, or even, *The young and handsome Dunois leaving for Syria*. Plaintive or warlike romance was in vogue. But this bourgeoisie, laughing and careless as it was about politics, was not happy, because it was being decimated by conscription, and trade alone bore the whole weight of the taxes.

As for the people properly so called, the proletarians, the workmen, they were undoubtedly glorious in their great Emperor; but more often than not misery overwhelmed him, although Napoleon commissioned extraordinary works, and that, to maintain the activity of the poor classes, he made enormous sacrifices. Now, these measures presupposed the existence of regular outlets, which alone maintain public prosperity. As a general rule, the well-being of a people results from the relationship between work and its needs: each time that work comes from extraordinary means ordered by the State, it is because there is an embarrassment in the situation of the country; there is no real well-being except when outlets are brought effortlessly to the level of products. Thus, we say, Napoleon ordered from the manufacturers of Lyons furnishings for his palaces; at the cabinet-making of the Faubourg Saint-Antoine, the furniture for his salons; he multiplied the works of the galleries of the Louvre, created halls, markets, granaries of abundance, etc.; but these very orders presupposed a commercial malaise, and free trade would have done, all by itself and without sacrifices, what the government was barely realizing by dint of sacrifices of money.

Serious minds understood that the Continental System, a gigantic creation, hurt all interests by taking them out of their usual course; but Napoleon would hear no objection. The Continental System was his dominant thought; he was busier than ever, too busy perhaps! Hey! how could he not have allowed himself to be seduced by hopes which were so close to being realized! Already cries of distress escaped his irreconcilable enemy; Napoleon had heard them: they were the groans of the English manufacturers. The blows he had prepared with so many combinations and patience, through so many difficulties and resistances, were therefore beginning to bear fruit? His gaze could not be detached from England. The sight she then presented to him captivated and encouraged him. In the countryside, starving workmen mutinied and spread disorder and terror afar; in London, the bar of the commons was incessantly invaded by a crowd of petitioners who demanded, with threats in their mouths, the revocation of the orders of the council; on all sides the most active discontent and even despair besieged the ministry! A few more efforts, and the general blockade would subdue British pride!

A last market still remained to be closed to English trade on the German coast, these were the ports of Swedish Pomerania. Sweden was our ally, she had declared war on England; but this double guarantee had been only fictitious, and the reality turned out to be quite the opposite of appearances. Strange concealment! The war served to protect very active commercial relations with the English, while the alliance only served to cover a hidden war which existed, in fact, against the intentions of Napoleon.

This state of things could not last longer, the Continental System being absolute in its nature. The measures which remained to be taken were therefore ordered by those which had already
been taken, and it was thus that the enclosure of the mouths of the Elbe was demanded, as well as the occupation of the country of Oldenburg. But it was not enough to have closed this coast, if Stralsund remained accessible to English smugglers. Napoleon could not hesitate in this respect, and during this time it was not without a keen feeling of regret that he found himself forced to take this part against Sweden, that old friend of France, who at this moment was not leaving of its system only because it was betrayed in its natural policy, by the Prince who should have most respected its bonds. The occupation of Pomerania had taken place in the first days of January 1811.

Not only did Napoleon work to tighten more and more the pressure under which the blockade held English trade, but the development which a new industry was giving to the manufactures of the Continent seemed to him another means of warfare, no less powerful, to direct against the common enemy. The enterprises whose object was to make up for the forced privation of colonial commodities, received the most magnificent encouragement. By discovering beet sugar and indigo in the productions of our soil, we had, so to speak, discovered a second America; so Napoleon hastened to publish this marvelous success. He never ceased to urge European commerce to take a bolder flight; he showed him, in our great fairs in Europe and in our principal markets, the empty counters which the English traders had been forced to abandon on this occasion, a Ministry of Commerce was created, and Count Colin de Sussy received this portfolio, by uniting customs and factories under his direction.

In his tours of January and February 1812, Napoleon carefully visited the factories, he examined them with a penetrating eye, questioned everyone, took an interest in all the details, made himself aware of all the obstacles, applauded everyone and all the successes, and gave the heads of the workshops bonuses, the owners the cross of the Legion of Honor. —It was thus that M. Benjamin Delessert was decorated on 2 January 1812, in his fine manufactory at Passy. The newspapers of the capital received the order to neglect political matters in order to spread far and wide the instructions which science offered to industry: as in Egypt, the scholars had once again become Napoleon's lieutenants!

It was only at the extremity of the Spanish Peninsula that the war against England continued by way of arms. All the military forces of the British nation were crowded there. It was part of Napoleon's plans to keep them there, because in this distant, costly, and murderous expedition, which continued under the orders of Wellington, he saw a last means of putting the crown to the exhaustion of our enemies.

King Joseph-Bonaparte had already reigned for two years. The greatest families of Spain had rallied round his throne. In the south, the capital of the kingdom of Valence had just handed over to Marshal Suchet its keys, its magazines, and the whole army which defended it. In the North, General Bonnet had made himself masters of Asturias. The resistance of the Cortes now had no refuge but the point of Cadiz. England was to be discouraged; she glimpsed a resource: it was Russia who presented it to her.

As a result of the continental blockade, the wealthy proprietors of Russia no longer sold their hemp, their timber, their tar, or their furs. They were asking for more with loud cries of buyers. The need of the Russian lords for English merchants had always thwarted the cabinet of St.
Petersburg, when it wished to separate its policy from that of England; too much resistance had cost the Emperor Paul dear!... What happened at the beginning of the year 1812, in St. Petersburg, is a new example of the influence that such interest could have demanding and so terrible memories.

The English ministers had never despaired of this return. As early as 1807, on receiving Russia's declaration of war, they had taken foresight to the point of laying, in their response, the bases of this inevitable reconciliation. "When the opportunity to restore peace between Great Britain and Russia presents itself," they said, "His Britannic Majesty will eagerly seize it. The arrangements for such a negotiation will be neither difficult nor complicated: His Majesty, having nothing to concede, will also have nothing to ask."*

*Declaration by England, 18 December 1807.

England was therefore on the eve of reaping the fruit of this policy; Russian and English merchants had begun to get along. The state of peace was reestablished by the fact, and English commerce had already recovered important advantages.

However, the cabinet of St. Petersburg thought it necessary to preserve some consideration, and it was the American flag which served to cover the English cargoes. "I have not contracted," says the Emperor Alexander, "any obligation which should prevent the trade of my States with neutrals. Trade was hampered, it suffered, it had rights to assert against me, and, the first, was its existence. After so many sacrifices, to want to deprive it of this remainder of business with the neutrals, it was an impossible thing."* This Prince added that his intentions were no less peaceful in regard to France and its allies; he only cited as proof the little importance he had given to the Oldenburg affair, and the silence kept on the occupation of Hamburg and Lübeck. "Finally," he said again, "a major consideration does not escape me, and although people avoid talking to me about it, I do not want to make a mystery of it. I know very well that I am not as great a captain as the Emperor Napoleon, and that I have no general to oppose to him: I know it, and that alone should convince of my desire to keep the peace"**

*Report by M. de Knesebeck.

**Report by M, from Knesebeck.

The North was in this doubtful state when news of the occupation of Swedish Pomerania reached St. Petersburg. This movement of the French troops poisoned the quarrel in the eyes of those who still hesitated and furnished new pretexts to those who hesitated no longer.

The Prince of Sweden complained as if he had not given, the first, the most serious grounds for complaint, and disregarded the duties of the alliance; he was indignant, affecting to take for the threat of a declaring enemy, which was really only the first impression of a discontented friend. Forgetting the interests of the two nations, he saw only his person; he imagined that Napoleon had wanted to push him to the limit; and, yielding to this first movement of a wounded self-esteem, he took a first step towards Russia!... A fatal step, the consequences of which were to finish tarnishing his life.
Dominated, as he himself confessed, by a secret instinct which made Bernadotte's sudden elevation to the first steps of the Swedish throne disagreeable to him, Napoleon had asked him, before he left France, to sign the pledge never to take up arms against him. Forced to give in to the reasons by which the new Crown Prince of Sweden motivated his refusal, Napoleon said to him: “Well, let’s not talk about it anymore;” and he himself delivered to him the letters of emancipation which relieved him of his oaths as a Frenchman, confining himself to speaking to him of his political system, and to demonstrating to him the obligation in which Sweden was to adhere to it.

Then taking a friendly tone, Napoleon promised Bernadotte three million indemnities for the cession of his principality of Ponte-Corvo and the endowments he had in Poland, reserving for him all the properties he possessed in France. In addition, the day after this interview, he made him a loan of four millions in gold, "to begin with," it was said in the letter of transmittal, "to set up his house properly."

Then, the very day that Bernadotte left Paris, Napoleon said in the evening to his Grand Marshal of the Palace, Duroc, whom he knew to be a friend of the Crown Prince:

"Well, doesn't Bernadotte miss France a little? What do you say now?"

"Without doubt, Sire."

"And I would have been charmed if he had not accepted; but what do you want? our destinies must be accomplished!... Besides, he does not love me..."

On Duroc's reply, that His Majesty was in error and that the Crown Prince had frankly come to his senses long ago, Napoleon resumed:

"We did not agree before his departure: now it is too late; my policy and his will never be able to agree."

And when, eighteen months later, Napoleon learned of the first negotiations between Bernadotte and Alexander, he could not help exclaiming, in a moment of exasperation and as he strode about in his study:

"I had to expect it... He always sacrificed everything to his personal interests! Hadn’t his envious and perfidious inaction already betrayed the French army at Auerstaedt! How many times have I not forgiven him his intrigues and his faults! Yet I have made him general-in-chief, marshal, duke, prince and king in short! But what do so many benefits to an ingrate and the forgiveness of so many injuries! For a century, if Sweden, half devoured by Russia, still exists independent, it is thanks to the support of France; but it does not matter: Bernadotte needs the baptism of the old aristocracy! a baptism of blood, and of blood French! And we will see that, to satisfy his ambition, he will betray both his old and his new homeland!"

But back to Russia.
At St. Petersburg they refused to consider, in its true light, the resolution which Napoleon had just approved with regard to Pomerania. Instead of recognizing that it was the result of all the measures already taken against English commerce, and that the Emperor of the French had only persisted in his system, people persisted in seeking his policy precisely where it had not originated; his character was misunderstood; they forgot that this vivid imagination, this firm will which always went straight before it, did not allow it to conceal the great thought which dominated it; that for the past two years his preoccupation with England was entirely reflected in his actions, in his speeches, in his correspondence, and even in his journals; that even at this moment his hours were employed in meditating and in acting against England; that, in short, his whole policy was there, and that he was not a man to thus give his time to an idea which was not his own.

Be that as it may, at St. Petersburg they only saw, or wished to see, in the march of Friant's division on Pomerania, only the arrival of a large French army on the Oder. M. de Nesselrode had been announced by the Emperor of Russia as having to go to Paris to settle the disputes; Alexander declared that, as things stood, such a step would be contrary to his dignity as Emperor, and that M. de Nesselrode would not leave. Count Charles de Lowenheim, aide-de-camp to the Prince of Sweden, on the contrary, appeared at St. Petersburg, and soon the rumor spread that definite arrangements were on the point of being concluded between Sweden and Russia.

But that was not all: for a long time the minds of the Russian population had been worked against the French, whom they represented to them as men who had no human faith, who recognized no religion, and who poured out bad manners all over the world. In the times of Tilsit and Erfurt, the great lords had openly disapproved of the alliance of the Czar and Napoleon; none of them had wished to understand the sacrifices which politics demanded for the safety of Russia; except for a few diplomats won over by Napoleon, all the gentlemen had declared themselves in favor of a firm and energetic war against France. The head of the French government was no longer referred to except in contemptuous terms. The Russian clergy, so powerful over the masses, had also vowed blind hatred to him whom they denounced, in their prayers, as the antichrist and the armed devil. When the Greek cross of Saint Ivan or the image of Saint Sergius was shown in the churches of Saint Petersburg or Moscow, a priest stood in the evangelical pulpit to read to the people thundering words against Napoleon and the French. In the eyes of this prostrate multitude, our own emperor was only an evil genius whom Russia was called, by God, to smother in her powerful arms. The people, always ardent, demanded war; and the old boyars, like the young lords, had devoted themselves to the common cause, without hesitation or fear. Submissive, but rambunctious; amiable, but shrewd, these sons of the old Slavic race, brave as their swords, know no other state than war, and a fierce war.

In St. Petersburg, where the ranks were classified by grades, where all the hierarchies were summed up by military distinctions, all the employees of the empire, civil, financial or judicial, were part of the army, from the minister to the tiniest police officer, and wanted to strengthen it. Finally, such was the irritation of the spirits at St. Petersburg, that Alexander himself saw himself obliged to repress this impulse which Napoleon's agents had been unable either to understand or to calm. It should not be mistaken, however: here, the nations of Europe entered the lists; the
two armies of the North and the South were only to be auxiliaries; the Russian people was the only enemy against which France was going to have to fight, because it alone was then sovereign... Napoleon seemed to have forgotten this principle, this truth, proclaimed by him ten years before in full Council of State, "that peoples are less easy to tame than kings!"