CHAPTER V

END OF NAPOLEON'S STAY IN DRESDEN.
LAST NEGOTIATIONS

Reason for which Napoleon prolonged his stay in Dresden. --Last attempt with the Emperor Alexander. --New mission entrusted to General Lauriston. --Recommendation made to the Duke de Bellune (Marshal Victor). --Words of the Emperor to the Duke de Bassano. --Requirement of the staffs of the kings commanding the army corps. --Letter from the Major General to the Minister of War on this subject. --Deference of Napoleon for the Prince von Schwarzenberg, Generalissimo of the Austrian army. --M. de Flahaut. --Sending of an extraordinary ambassador to Warsaw. --Napoleon designates M. de Pradt, Archbishop of Mechelen. --Why. --Instructions which the Emperor himself gives to this Ambassador, in his audience of leave. --Napoleon could not have made a worse choice. --He talks about it in Saint Helena: portrait he makes of M. de Pradt. --Arrival of M. de Narbonne in Dresden. --The *sine qua non* of the Emperor Alexander. --Resolution of Napoleon. --He is leaving Dresden. --Sovereigns and princes return to their states. --Empress Marie-Louise's trip to Prague; his return to Saint-Cloud. --Assembly of the French Grand Army. --It is only waiting for Napoleon's orders to go forward.

However Napoleon was still in Dresden, and whatever confidence the words of devotion and warlike demonstrations of all the princes, his allies, with whom he is surrounded, must have inspired in him, Napoleon, we say, cannot resign himself to leaving this capital of Saxony before having received news from M. de Narbonne, dispatched, as we know, to the Emperor Alexander*, because, at the point where affairs had reached, the mission of this aide-de-camp, although quite confidential, could still bring the Czar to an accommodation. The representatives of almost all the powers of Europe, who group around the Emperor of the French, are, in the eyes of the latter, only one more motive for arriving at this peaceful denouement.

*See pages 147 and 148, chapter iv, of the first part of our work.

On 20 May, Napoleon had summoned the Duke de Bassano to his study, and had said to him:

"I want to make one last step. Write to Lauriston that he goes from St. Petersburg to Vilna. He will say that, in a hurry to put aside this quarrel between people of letters, I gave him the order to cross the intermediaries, and to reach the Emperor Alexander, to obtain from his mouth a word of explanation which then leaves the way open for our accommodation. Lauriston will add that I am persuaded that the Russian Ambassador went beyond his instructions. Send Kurakin's note to Lauriston, which he will place before the Emperor; it is impossible that there is not some misunderstanding in all this. Certainly, that is not the language of Alexander, and I know him."**
He said again to the Duc de Bassano:

"Write to the Duke of Bellune (Victor), who Swedish Pomerania in his command, that he must continue to treat the Swedes as friends; despite the bad temper of the Crown Prince (Bernadotte), things are not yet hopeless."

The head of the Secretariat of State immediately dispatched two couriers, recommending the greatest diligence to them. After this last attempt, Napoleon resumed, with new activity, the continuation of his begun military arrangements, and said the same evening to the Duke of Bassano, when the latter came to warn him that his orders had been carried out:

"Well, now let the Russians do what they will: never has the success of an expedition against them been more certain. I see on all sides only probability in my favor. Not only do I advance at the head of the immense forces which France, Italy, Germany, the Confederation of the Rhine and Poland have exhausted themselves in supplying me, but still I march with two monarchies which, until now, had been, against me, the two most powerful auxiliaries of Russia, Austria and Prussia. These two powers have come to my side today; they have espoused my quarrel with the eagerness of old friends. Why can't I to count Turkey and Sweden in the same way? Turkey must at this moment have resumed arms against the Russians; Bernadotte is still hesitating, it is true; but anyway he is French: he will remember it at the first cannon shot, and will not will not want to deny Sweden such a fine opportunity to take revenge on Charles XII! Nothing but a confluence of favorable circumstances will not be able to reappear: I feel that it involves me; and, if the Emperor Alexander insists on refusing my proposals, I will cross the Niemen!"**

*See the note on page 249, in Chapter IV of the first part of our work, relating to the peace of Bucharest and the defection of Sweden.

**Baron Fain, Manuscript of 1812, 1st Part, Chapter X.

The next day the Emperor notified all the corps commanders that the season of operations was about to begin; and, on this occasion, the Major General of the Army (Marshal Berthier) wrote to the Minister of War in Paris:

"The kings who form part of His Imperial Majesty's army have very exacting staffs; nothing less than the superiority of the Emperor is needed to keep them on a military footing; I beg Your Excellency to kindly second me; his help is necessary for me to resist the demands of the kings commanding the corps of the Grand Army, in what is contrary to the general order, established in the field by His Majesty himself."*

*Letter from the Prince of Neufchatel to the Duke of Feltre, dated 28 May 1812.

Napoleon, who neglected nothing, wanted the Prince von Schwarzenberg to be informed of what was going on at Dresden. The affection which the Emperor of Austria never ceased to show for his son-in-law, the union which reigned between the two courts, all the fine details of this imposing meeting could, much better than the cold instructions of the cabinet, inspire the
Generalissimo of the Austrian army the zeal Napoleon needed. This mission of confidence was given to an aide-de-camp to the Major-General, Colonel Flahaut**, who made his way to Warsaw, there to announce at the same time the arrival of the Imperial General Headquarters.

**The same who later became the Emperor's aide-de-camp.

Napoleon could therefore no longer defer sending an ambassador to Warsaw. Forced as he had been to renounce M. de Talleyrand, he wanted at least to have there a reliable man who, with the help of a great representation and an unequaled activity, would equally dominate the council, the Diet. and the waves of the Polish insurrection; but this ambassador, it was necessary, so to speak, to improvise him: on the proposal of Grand Marshal Duroc, the Emperor decided on the Archbishop of Mechelen who, being part of his civil household, in the capacity of ordinary chaplain, had accompanied them to Dresden. The dignity with which M. de Pradt was invested seemed destined to complete all the means of influence which were necessary to him; but this time Napoleon's choice was not happy, and he himself, at Saint Helena, he often deplored: “The Abbé de Pradt,” he said, “did not achieve in Warsaw any of the goals I had set for myself; on the contrary, he did a great deal of harm. Rumors and denunciations against him came in droves to meet me. The auditors attached to his embassy, even the youngest, were daily shocked by his bearing and his speeches; later they went so far as to accuse him of intelligence with the enemy, which I never wanted to believe. However, for the rest, the Abbé de Pradt deserved, in Warsaw, to be compared to a prostitute who lends her body to everyone for money.”* This judgment of Napoleon was severe; but it was unfortunately only too true.

*Memorial, Volume III, page 115 et seq. –O'Meara, Volume 1, page 165.

Be that as it may, M. de Pradt received, with his appointment as ambassador, the order to proceed immediately to Warsaw. In his farewell audience, the Emperor, abbreviating all his instructions, said to him:

"If I enter Russia, I will perhaps go as far as Moscow; one or two battles will open the way to me. Moscow is the real capital of the Russian Empire. Arriving there, I must undoubtedly find the peace. I therefore believe that a campaign will be enough for me; but if the war drags on, it will be up to the Poles to do the rest. I will leave them fifty thousand Frenchmen and a subsidy of fifty millions to help them. Such is my plan. You are instructed, act accordingly. Your first care must be to obtain a great impetus; then this movement must be sustained by the most obstinate efforts: and I count on you to direct the zeal and the good will of these brave men."

It was thus that the passing of time pressed Napoleon in all his dispositions, while awaiting the return of M. de Narbonne, when on 28 May, a dusty post-chaise entered the courtyard of the palace: it was M. de Narbonne who came to report on his mission. He had been received at Vilna: he had seen the Emperor Alexander; but this prince had remained steadfast in the resolution he had taken. His definitive answer, delivered by M. de Romanzoff, said that: "He (Alexander) referred to the instructions sent in April to Prince Kurakin, his ambassador, and that he could not depart from them."
While listening to M. de Narbonne, Napoleon walked with great strides: then the story of his aide-de-camp was followed by a moment of silence, which he broke by exclaiming:

"So, any way to get along now becomes impossible! The spirit which dominates the Russian cabinet impels it to war! you bring me only the confirmation of Kurakin's proposals: It is the sine qua non of Russia!... The princes who are here had warned me of it. They know that we have been summoned to take the road to the Rhine; the Russians boasted about it, and there is no one in Dresden who has not received confidences in this respect; but now, publicity has put the finishing touch to the insult!... Let's not waste our time in fruitless negotiations, and let our destinies be fulfilled!"*

*Baron Fain, Manuscript of 1812, Volume 1, 1st Part, Chapter XI.

Immediately Napoleon prepared to leave Dresden. On 28 May, he signed and updated the work that the ministers and the Council of State had sent to him from Paris; and on the 29th of May, at three o'clock in the morning, he set out to put himself at the head of his army. Marshal Berthier accompanied him in his carriage. His whole household, whether civil or military, followed him or preceded him. The Duke of Bassano and Count Daru remained in Dresden for dispatching the couriers: they were only to join the Emperor later.

As soon as Napoleon left, every sovereign, every prince hastened to return to his States. Empress Marie-Louise saw, for the first time, the crowd pass before her. In the first moment of a painful separation, she had promised her father, the Emperor of Austria, to go with him to spend a fortnight in Prague. She therefore left Dresden on the 4th of June to make this journey. They tried to distract her with parties; then she resumed the road to France and arrived at Saint-Cloud on the 8th of July following.

Meanwhile, the French Grand Army had arrived on the Vistula, in front of Danzig. The Imperial Guard alone was behind a few marches. The Viceroy of Italy had returned to his headquarters at Plock; the King of Westphalia, Jerome Bonaparte, had placed himself at the head of his troops at Modlin. As for the King of Naples, instead of waiting patiently until our united cavalry divisions had formed into a mass to take command, singularly shocked that the Emperor had not allowed him, despite his requests, to come to Dresden to augment the cortege of crowned heads which were there, Murat, we say, had gone to find Rapp, at Danzig, and poured out in the heart of this former comrade-in-arms the sorrows and the tribulations, he said, that the Emperor never ceased to make him feel, ever since he had the misfortune to be king.*

*Rapp, Memoirs, Chapter XXIII.

But all the detachments whose march had been delayed soon joined. The army corps increased from hour to hour; a formidable artillery and innumerable crews debouched from all sides, and our forces found themselves developed in an immense line. However, the corps commanders still did not know in which direction their columns were to march; four hundred thousand men stationed, arms in arm, from the mouths of the Vistula to the Krapacks mountains, had, so to speak, their eyes fixed on Dresden; they were only waiting for the Emperor's orders... These orders weren't long in coming!