CHAPTER VI

OPENING OF THE CAMPAIGN

Napoleon enters Poland. --Appearance of the country. --Posen. --Measures of order and discipline. --Complaints of the inhabitants against the foreign troops. --Thorn. --Congestion. --Order of the Emperor. - March of the corps of the Grand Army. --Napoleon arrives at Danzig. --Rapp governor of this town. --About a bust of the late Queen of Prussia. --The King of Naples. --Interview of Napoleon with Rapp. --The little supper. --Marshal Berthier. --Rapp frankness. --Inspection and review passed by the Emperor. --Audience given to the senate and to the notables of Danzig. --Party of two. --Table talk. --Napoleon informs his lieutenants of his plans for the future. --Enthusiasm produced by his words. --Rapp's request to the Emperor: granted.--Napoleon leaves Danzig and arrives at Königsberg. --Return of Colonel Flahaut. --Napoleon's intentions regarding Poland. --General Belliard, Chief of Staff of Murat. --News from M. de Lauriston. All attempts made with the Emperor Alexander failed. --The Russian war is officially declared. --Proclamation of the Emperor to the Grand Army. -Magic effect it produces on soldiers.

Impatient to conquer and still more to give the signal for battle, Napoleon, in his rapid course, had arrived at Glogau on the 29th of May, and on the 30th he entered Poland.

This country had appeared to our soldiers, in 1806, under the aspect of winter, and an unfavorable impression had remained on them; but this time Spring covered it with greenery. It was no longer these deserts which were lost in the vagueness of the snows: clumps of wood sketched over in a picturesque way the contours of the plains on the horizon, and one could see, on all sides, dwellings which the misty veil of frost had not even let suspect before.

Napoleon stopped for a moment at Posen, to reply to a dispatch from the Duke of Bassano; then he proceeded to Thorn, where he arrived on 2 June. Coming out of the sandy forests he had traversed, he saw the Vistula, crossed it, and found himself at last in the midst of his troops.

There, his first dispositions were measures of order and policing. He had noticed many stragglers on his way; he welcomed the just complaints that the unfortunate Polish peasants came to make to him of the brutal way in which the soldiers were trampling their villages; the Württemberg troops principally had been outrageous in their excesses; the Emperor insulted their chief, whom he met on his way, and this chief was none other than the Prince of Württemberg himself. There were also complaints about the Westphalians, and the King of Westphalia, brother of Napoleon as he was, none the less suffered sharp reproaches. In the evening, the
Emperor wrote to all his lieutenants that they should hold discipline in their respective corps with a firmer hand.

The town of Thorn itself presented, in its interior, disorders of another kind: it was a frightful encumbrance. Equipment of all kinds obstructed the streets: they tore up lodgings; to add to the embarrassment, the headquarters was surrounded by a crowd of German envoys, because each prince had wanted to have his representative there: it was a military diplomacy as numerous as it was importunate.

"Ask these gentlemen," said the Emperor to his Grand Squire, "not to follow me so closely."*

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

Count Daru had joined Napoleon at Posen; the Duke of Bassano found him at Thorn. The Emperor saw in this city Prince Eugene, several of the marshals who were commanders in chief of the army corps, and the directors of the principal departments of the general administration. All of them burst forth, at the sight of him, the ardor which animated them.

"Our war movements are beginning," Napoleon told them; "the passage of the Vistula has unmasked my plans: from this moment I have strong marches to ask of you and your soldiers."**

**See Appendix (First Part), military correspondence and the manner in which the Emperor's orders were dispatched.

The Viceroy and the King of Westphalia received orders to proceed to the Upper Niemen, crossing the Duchy of Warsaw by the roads which opened before them.

Marshal Ney, whose column heads were at Osterode, had to continue to advance towards the Pregel, by Heilsberg.

The 1st and 2nd Corps were already on the great Prussian road from Elbing to Königsberg; this road, which offered more resources, had to be the main line of communication for the general headquarters, transport and administration.

After having put all his columns in motion, Napoleon left Thorn on 6 June and went on an excursion as far as Danzig, where he was received on the evening of the 7th by his aide-de-camp, General Rapp, who for several years was governor of this town.

On entering the salon, the eyes of the Emperor were attracted by a magnificent bust of the late Queen of Prussia which, placed on a console, was in evidence:

"Master Rapp," said Napoleon smiling, "I warn you that I will report to Marie-Louise for this infidelity."
Murat arrived. In the presence of the Emperor, the latter only aspired to give him new proofs of zeal and submission, because with the King of Naples the heart spoke above all:

"Ah! ah!" said Napoleon in a sardonic tone, seeing his brother-in-law, "it's you! You no longer have that beautiful mien you once did. Would you be ill or would you be sad?. Anyway, are you no longer content to be king?"

"Really, Sire," replied the prince, "I am hardly so!"

"That's what it is! you desperately want to fly on your own, and you confuse your position. Believe me, leave this petty Neapolitan policy there, and be French above all: your job as king will be much simpler and above all much easier than you think."

It was late: Napoleon, finding himself tired, dismissed his brother-in-law as well as Rapp; but a moment later he summoned the latter, and the first thing he spoke to him about was the alliance he had concluded with Prussia and Austria. Rapp, who governed in the name of the Emperor in an allied country, could not help telling him, with the frankness which characterized him, that unfortunately the presence of so many troops gathered on the same point could cause great evils to the country.

At these words, Napoleon shook his head, as he was wont to do when he was displeased; and, after a silence, no longer familiar with his aide-de-camp, he said to him with vivacity:

"M. General, all this is only a torrent that must be let through; it won't last long. First of all, I must know, above all, whether Alexander definitely wants war or not."

Then changing the conversation, he added:

"Didn't you find, like me, something extraordinary in Murat?... Of course he is ill, or else he is in a bad mood."

"Sire, the King of Naples is not ill, but he is sad."

"Sad? and why?. Isn't he glad I made him king?"

"Sire, he claims he is not."

"It's his fault! When he's in his kingdom he doesn't do anything worthwhile... And then he promotes trade with the English: I don't want that!" he added, tapping the floor with the heel of his boot.

Then the Emperor waved his hand to his aide-de-camp, as if to urge him to retire; but at the same time he said to him in that tone of benevolence which he had formerly had with him:

"Remember you're having supper with me tonight."
The Governor of Danzig therefore found himself at supper with the Emperor, who had caused the King of Naples and Berthier to be invited. Before they sat down to table, the conversation turned to the Emperor of Austria; then, Napoleon returning again to the bust of the late Queen of Prussia, told his aide-de-camp that he could not conceive that he kept such an ornament in his drawing-room.

"But, Sire," objected Rapp, "did not your Majesty do me the honor of telling me, only a moment ago, that Prussia was today your ally?"

"It's not a reason!" replied the Emperor. "Still, this bust is not a good likeness."

The supper began; but it was sad because Napoleon kept silent; however, Murat dared not speak first. As for Berthier, he only cared about what he had on his plate. Finally, the Emperor broke this silence by asking Rapp:

"Do you know how many there are, from Cadiz to Danzig?"

"It is too far, Sire."

Although this answer had been made without affectation, Napoleon frowned: no more familiarity then.

"General, I understand you," resumed the Emperor, "and yet in a few days we shall be even further."

"Too bad, sir."

"Huh?" said the Emperor.

Here there was another moment of silence. Neither Murat nor Berthier, whose face Napoleon examined with a searching eye, uttered a word; it was the master who, like the first time, broke it by saying, without specifically addressing any of his guests:

"I can clearly see that we no longer want to make war. H.M. the King of Naples would not want to leave the beautiful climate of his kingdom; the Prince of Neufchâtel would prefer to hunt in his magnificent land of Gros-Bois; and General Rapp is impatient to live in his fine mansion in Paris..."

At this triple apostrophe, Murat and Berthier remained motionless; it was Rapp again who picked up the ball, saying in a casual tone:

"Faith, Sire, I confess it, because I cannot conceal it from Your Majesty."

"Well, I like this frankness better!" replied the Emperor, with a half smile; "at least I said what to expect."
Having said this, Napoleon rose from the table, bade his guests good evening, and retired to the
apartment which had been prepared for him, leaving Murat, Berthier and Rapp standing to look
at each other with a slightly embarrassed air: Murat held out the first hand to Rapp, saying:

"You were right and a thousand times right to speak as you did to the Emperor: I admire your
boldness."

"In fact, General," said Berthier, "you answered as you should."

"My princes," said the governor of Danzig in his turn, "since you think I have done so well, why
did you leave me to speak alone?"

The next day, before sunrise, Napoleon was on horseback. Accompanied by Murat, Marshal
Berthier, and Rapp, he visited all the works of the place, and seemed satisfied with the work; but,
perceiving something that displeased him, he turned quickly towards Rapp and said to him in an
animated tone:

"M. General, I do not want my governors to decide for the sovereign; I want the regulations to
be carried out."

The contravention was real, for it was indeed; but of so little importance, that it did not deserve a
warning formulated in this way.

"Don't worry about this reproach," said Murat in a low voice to his former comrade in arms; "the
Emperor is not in a good mood, because he received letters this morning which dissatisfied."

Napoleon continued his journey and returned at noon. At two o'clock he received the body of
officers of the garrison of Danzig, as well as the senate and the authorities of the town. He
addressed to them various questions on trade and finance.

"What do MM. the Danzigers do with their money, that which they earn and that which I spend
at home?" he asked.

One of the members of the senate replied that their situation was far from prosperous, that they
were suffering, and that trade especially was at bay.

"That will change soon," Napoleon replied.

Seeing Mr. Franzins the elder, one of the richest merchants in Danzig:

"As for you, sir," he added, "you don't complain, because your affairs are in fairly good
condition. You have at least ten millions of fortune, don't you?

"Sire, it is far from it," replied the latter.

"Well, if you don't have them yet, you will one day," replied Napoleon, smiling.*
The Emperor employed the rest of the day in reviewing the garrison. On returning to the castle at nightfall, as he was dismounting from his horse and Rapp had rushed off his to hold the stirrup for him, although this task was not within his attributions, the Emperor gave him a familiar hand on the shoulder saying to him:

"You will know that we are having supper together again tonight."

Then, retired to his study, he worked there until after nine o'clock and then found himself with Murat, Berthier and Rapp, his guests from the day before. He then gave himself up, with them, to the abandonment of an old friendship; he told them, in detail, all he had done to avoid this new war and the faint hopes that remained to him that it would not begin.

"Besides," he added, "we are nearing the denouement. A fortnight's journey separates us from the Russians; by then, Lauriston will perhaps obtain some explanation; but once on the Niemen, everything will be decided!... If I stopped then, they will march!"

In this confidential interview, Napoleon spoke of France, of his wife, of his son, of the monuments and institutions that he wanted to complete or found. There was also talk of Spain, and he revealed his whole policy to his lieutenants:

"Gentlemen," he said to them in a serious tone, "I received news from Cadiz and Soult in the morning. What a long way, indeed!" --he added, looking at Rapp; --"but everything is so well organized, that my communications will be rapid and then I will be able to do everything. While we are going to finish with the North, I hope that the Duke of Dalmatia will remain in Andalusia, and that Marmont will be able to contain Wellington on the frontier of Portugal. Europe will only breathe when these affairs of Spain and Russia are over. Then, and only then, can we count on a profound peace. Resurgent Poland will consolidate; Austria will no longer concern itself with its Danube. and much less of Italy, where it has nothing to do; finally England, exhausted, will resign itself to sharing the commerce of the world with the ships of the Continent. My son is young, we must prepare a quiet reign for him. ..."

"Certainly, Sire," replied Murat, Berthier and Rapp simultaneously and as if in one voice; the latter even added:

"Sire, we regret the peace, no doubt; but it is better for your Majesty to have war today than an arrangement followed by a lame peace. You always have to start over again," ventured Berthier to say.

"And Your Majesty says that he can always count on us!" exclaimed Murat, whose beautiful face had resumed its usual pride.

"Sire," cried Rapp, straightening up suddenly, "I have a request to make to Your Majesty!"
"Speak, my old friend," said Napoleon.

"Sire, your Rapp still handles his horse and his saber well enough not to be relegated here, like an old invalid, when you go to fight... Allow me to resume, close to your person, my service of aide de camp?"

"I consent to it," replied the Emperor; "but you will not join me at my headquarters until the passage of the army through Danzig has been completed."

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

Napoleon left this town on 11 June, very early in the morning, and took the road to Königsberg by Marienburg. On the way he rejoined Davout's six fine divisions and reviewed them. It was an elite troop that this marshal had formed, and which numbered no less than eighty thousand bayonets.**

**See Appendix (Second Part), the list of names of each of the distinct corps of the Grand Army.

On the 12th, the Emperor arrived at Königsberg with Murat, who had accompanied him. While the different corps were executing their march to unite at the fixed points, Napoleon occupied himself only with the subsistence and transport of the army.

Colonel Flahaut returned from the headquarters of the Prince von Schwarzenberg, where he had been sent from Dresden, and gave an account to the Emperor of the devotion of this generalissimo and of the impatience shown by his troops to overthrow the Russians. Napoleon did not seem to believe too much in this impatience; however, he allowed himself to be persuaded by thinking that, in the long run, protests can become sincere when they are based on benefits; then, in the presence of all the general officers who surrounded him, he explained his plan of campaign and his projects:

"If Alexander," he said, "persists in not executing the agreements we have made, if he does not want to accede to the last proposals that I submitted to him, I cross the Niemen, I defeat his army, and I seize Russian Poland; I reunite it with the Grand Duchy, I make it a kingdom, where I will leave fifty thousand men as a national body; they are warlike, they will soon have numerous and seasoned troops: Poland lacks arms, I will furnish her with them; she will restrain the Russians; it will be a barrier against the eruption of their Cossacks... But I do not know what course to take with regard to Galicia; the Emperor of Austria, or rather his advice, does not want to let go of it: I offered ample compensation, they were refused... We must leave it to events, only they will learn what to do once well organized, can provide fifty thousand cavalry: what do you say, General Belliard?"

This general, whom Murat had chosen for his chief of staff, had accompanied the King of Naples to Königsberg, and consequently formed part of the splendid staff with which Napoleon found himself surrounded at this moment; so he replied, bowing:
"Sire, I believe that if Your Majesty put the infantry of the Vistula on horseback, you would make excellent light cavalry of them, which could effectively be opposed, with success, to those clouds of Cossacks whose Russians are always preceded or follow."

"We will see that later. Now that you have abandoned your Swiss to follow Murat, what do you think of these people?"

“They will be well, Sire, and will fight likewise; they have gained a lot for six weeks: they are no longer recognizable.”

"Come on, so much the better! Serve the King of Naples well; I charge you to see with him all our cavalry."*

*Rapp, Memoirs, Chapter XXIV.

Napoleon remained at Königsberg until the 17th, made a very gracious welcome to the Prussian generals who were there, worked with the local authorities, and appointed his aide-de-camp Hogendorp governor of this place.

On the evening of the 17th, the Emperor was at Wehlau and on the 18th at Insterbourg; on the 19th he continued on his way and reached Gumbinnen. Here peace expired. A courier from St. Petersburg put an end to the doubtful state in which Napoleon was advancing from the Vistula. Ambassador Lauriston had made vain entreaties to go to Vilna. The governor of St. Petersburg, who had orders, constantly refused to let him go. All that had been granted to him had been to send an express message to the Emperor Alexander, who had confined himself to having M. de Lauriston reply: "that he should put in writing what he had to say." A secretary attached to the French embassy in St. Petersburg arrived soon after, and confirmed this news, as well as the definitive rupture between Russia and France.

"It's all over!" said Napoleon. "The Russians, whom we have always defeated, are assuming the tone of conquerors; most opportune that ever presented itself. M. Romanzoff’s refusal puts an end to all my hesitations and preserves me from an unpardonable fault. Let us accept, as a favor, the opportunity which does us violence and cross the Niemen!"*

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

Napoleon remained two days at Gumbinnen; he reviewed all the Imperial Guard which had joined him, spoke to his old legions, dictated to Berthier the First Bulletin of the Grand Army,** which was to inform Europe that the war against Russia had begun, and finally ordered that the following proclamation should be placed the next morning with the order of the army, and read before the front of each regiment:

**See this Bulletin at the end of the Appendix (Part Two).
"Soldiers!"

"The Second Polish War has begun. The first ended in Friedland and Tilsit. At Tilsit, Russia swore eternal alliance to France and war to England! Today she violates her oaths! She does not want to give any explanation for her strange conduct, that the French eagles have not recrossed the Rhine, thereby leaving our allies to her discretion."

"Russia is driven by fate! its destinies must be accomplished. Would she believe us, then, degenerate? Are we no longer serious about the soldiers of Austerlitz? It places us between dishonor and war: the choice cannot be doubtful. So, let's go forward! Let us cross the Niemen; let us wage war on its territory. The second Polish war will be glorious to the French armies like the first; but the peace which we shall conclude will carry with it its guarantee and will put an end to this proud influence which Russia has exercised for fifty years over the affairs of Europe!"

"NAPOLEON"

As we see, the Emperor had not forgotten the ancient language of the Caesars, when reminding the veterans of his army of their past victories. Such was the power of Napoleon's proclamations that the soldier heard them as the word of oracles. The guard especially saluted this one with cries of joy and enthusiasm. A new war, for old and proud soldiers, is more honor for their flags: also they all reflected the brilliance of the sublime words of their emperor on their male faces

END OF PART TWO