

An Account of the Remarkable Campaigns of the Man of Destiny

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XVII. THE BATTLE OF WAGRAM.

The Austrian army, in abandoning the capital of the empire, had not renounced the will, although in a day Napoleon had, with one stroke of his sword, cut in two the mass of his armies, and with the second burst open the gates of Vienna.

The Archduke Charles was soon tempted to quit the fastness of Bohemia, and try once more the fortune of a battle. Having re-established the order, and cruited the numbers of his army to 100,000 men, he was soon posted on the banks of the Danube. Opposite were the French, and the river being greatly swollen, and all the bridges destroyed, the river presented the nature of an impassable barrier.

On the 21st, at daybreak, the archduke appeared on a rising ground, separated from the French position by an extensive plain. His whole force was in three or four heavy columns, and protected by not less than 200 pieces of artillery. The battle began at 4 o'clock in the afternoon with a furious assault on the village of Aspern, which was held by the French several times, and remained at nightfall in the occupation partly of the French and partly of the assailants, who had established themselves in the church and in the houses of the village.

Just as Napoleon was about to retire for a few hours rest he was interrupted by a violent altercation between two of his chief lieutenants, Bessieres and Lannes, the former of whom complained of the language used by the latter, his inferior in rank, in giving a necessary order for a charge of cuirassiers and chasseurs, then under the orders of Marshal Bessieres himself.

ed by passing the river out of reach of their fire, and then, at an end. For the secretly erected by the French. When Napoleon had a river to be crossed he began the operation by suddenly conveying some determined men to the opposite side in boats. These men, in the night, were to kill the enemy's advanced posts, and to fix the moorings to which the boats were to be attached that were to carry the bridge.

The first of these operations was the most difficult in presence of an enemy so numerous and so well prepared as were the Austrians. To facilitate it, Napoleon had large rafts constructed, capable of carrying 300 men each, and having a moving gunwale to protect the men from musketry, which on being let down, would serve instead of planks for landing. Every raft was manned by a detachment of 100 men, which made an advance guard of 1500 men carried off at once, and the enemy, not knowing exactly where the crossing would be made, could not concentrate his forces to oppose the passage of sufficient numbers to prevent their landing.

The Austrians having rashly calculated that Aspern and Essling must needs be the decisive battles of the campaign, the preceding, they were taken almost unawares by Napoleon's appearance in another quarter. They changed their line in the instant and occupied a position, the center of which was the little town of Wagram. Here, on the 6th of July, the final and decisive battle was to be fought. Adding together the troops of Massena, Udoind, Davoust, Bernadotte, Lannes, Bessieres, and the Emperor, he had 100,000 men; of whom 20,000 were cavalry and 12,000 artillerymen serving 500 guns.

When the day dawned on the banks of the river, about 4 o'clock in the morning, a most impressive spectacle was presented to both armies. The sun glistened on thousands of bayonets and helmets, and 70,000 men were already in line of battle on the enemy's side of the river capable of making at once an opportunity of the duke's forces. Seeing Napoleon ride along the front of the lines his soldiers raised their shouts on their bayonets and cried: "Vive l'Empereur!"

On receiving the message he looked up and replied with extraordinary emphasis: "Go tell the emperor I will hold out two hours—so long as it is necessary for the safety of the army!" It was during this exciting retreat that Napoleon, who had been in the front of the line from one corps to another, encouraging his soldiers by his voice and his example, an officer who was alarmed at seeing him exposed to so much danger, entreated him to dismount for greater safety. He followed the advice, though it was far from his habit to be careful of his life. At that instant he was struck by a cannon ball and shattered both his wrists, which rendered him almost insensible. Bessieres, with whom he had quarreled on the preceding day, pressed his weak hand. He was laid on a cuirassier's cloak and carried to a little distance, where he lay for some time motionless. The news soon spread through the army and filled it with sorrow. The surgeon declared his wounds to be mortal.

In his frenzy the brave marshal called for Napoleon, his friend. The latter observed a group advancing, supporting Lannes on a bier formed of crossed firelocks and some branches of oak. Twelve old grenadiers, covered with blood and dirt, bore the emperor on their shoulders. Napoleon, throwing himself upon his old companion-in-arms, who had fainted with grief, said, several times, "Lannes, my friend, do you know me? It is the emperor, it is Bonaparte, your friend!" At these words Lannes opened his eyes, and, with closed, collected his spirits, and, with some assistance, he was able to pass them, he could only lift his dying arms to pass them round the neck of Napoleon. The fear of exhausting the little life still remaining in the marshal determined the emperor to leave him.

Somewhat later Napoleon visited his wounded friend and conversed with him briefly. "My brave marshal," said the emperor, "it is all over." "What!" cried the dying man, "can't you save me?" He died in a few moments. Napoleon, who had done at the death of Desaix at Marengo, the French soldier delighted to call him the "Roland of the Camp," and Napoleon said, "It was impossible to have a man more noble than this man could inspire his soldiers with more confidence than could this brave soldier who had been the companion of the fortunes and glory of Napoleon from the very beginning of his public career."

Napoleon had charged Lannes to maintain Essling at all hazards and he valiantly fulfilled his task. At length, at 9 o'clock, the sanguinary conflict ceased; the French, notwithstanding the greater force which they had, were driven back, and the Austrians bivouacking where they were. Both sides sustained an equal loss, from 15,000 to 20,000 men having been killed or wounded on both sides. Among the Austrians were four field marshals, eight generals and 665 officers.

On the morning of the 22d of May the French were reeoped up in Lobau and the Archduke Charles, who had been in the possession of the Austrians, on either side a victory was claimed. In the eyes of Europe it was a check for Napoleon, and necessary, therefore, to re-organize the army. He was unable at this time to drive the Austrians from their position. The situation of the French emperor was imminent hazardous; he was supported more by Davoust and his reserves, and had the enemy either attacked him in the islands or passed the river higher up and so overwhelmed Davoust and re-occupied Vienna, the result might have been a total rout. The archduke's loss in these two days had been very great; and, in place of risking an offensive movement, he contented himself with strengthening the position of Aspern and Essling, and waiting for the passage of the river, and the re-occupation of the hardly contested village.

They were also given to understand that they were to be at a distance, and the regiments were instructed not to salute the emperor with acclamations at the moment he was passing. On the following morning, after a very early start, Napoleon went to place himself in the midst of his troops who were about to pursue the retreating enemy. He walked around the bivouacs with either hat or sword, his hands being crossed behind him, and as he talked with the soldiers of his guard his manner and countenance expressed the utmost satisfaction and confidence. On passing Macdonald he said, "I must henceforth and who had not followed the fortunes of the emperor for some years, Napoleon stopped and held out his hand, saying: "Shake hands, Macdonald; no more acclamations between us, we must henceforth be friends; and, as a pledge of my sincerity, I will send you your marshal's staff, which you so gloriously earned in yesterday's battle." The general, pressing the emperor's hand affectionately, replied: "Ah, sire, with us it is henceforth life or death." The act was heightened by the grace and good will with which he granted a few days after to General Oudinot and the Duke of Ragusa (Marmont), for their eminent services.

After the battle Napoleon recognized among the dead a colonel who had displeased him. He stopped and looked at the mangled body for a moment and then said, "I regret not having told him before that I should have been his friend. I should also add, that far from ever having to complain, I have on the contrary only had cause to laud the attachment and tenderness of my loved wife. She has adorned 15 years of my life with the most beautiful of will always remain graven on my heart."

Josephine then appeared among them, and, without a word, she pressed her forehead to the emperor's. "I believe I acknowledge all these sentiments," she said, "by consenting to a dissolution of a marriage which, at present, is an obstacle to the welfare of the state, which deprives it of being one day governed by the descendants of a great man, so evidently favored by Providence to efface the ills of a terrible and bloody war, to re-establish the altar, the throne and social order."

The council, after addressing the emperor and expressing on the nobleness of the act, the emperor, in a few words, ratified the dissolution of marriage. The title of empress was preserved to Josephine for life, and a pension of 2,000,000 francs, to which she added a third of the million from her private property. She then retired from the Tuileries, residing thenceforth mostly at Malmaison, and in the course of a few weeks Austria was called upon for her daughter to be married to the emperor's son, the archduke Francis.

Having given her hand at Vienna on the 11th of March, 1810, to Berthier, who had the honor to represent the person of the emperor, she retired to the duchess set out for France on the 11th. On the 23th, as her carriage was proceeding toward Solms, Napoleon rode to meet her in a dress, altogether unattended, and intimate, and in a proxy bride. She had never seen her person till then, and it is said her first exclamation was: "Your majesty's pictures have not done her justice."

They spent the evening at the chateau of Compiegne, and a religious marriage was celebrated on the 1st of April, 1811, by the birth of a son and heir, whom Napoleon announced to the waiting courtiers in these words: "It is the king of Rome!" A happy event, announced to the people by the firing of 101 guns, was received with many demonstrations of loyal enthusiasm. Even Josephine joined in exultation, her satisfaction being increased by the founding of a Napoleonic dynasty which the emperor now saw possible by direct lineage.

The emperor of Russia was informed of Napoleon's approaching nuptials with the Austrian princess, his first exclamation was, "Then the next thing will be to see him back into our forests." During the summer of 1811, the relations of Russia and France were becoming every day more dubious, and when toward the close of the year, Austria published a rescript granting a free passage through her territories to the troops of his son-in-law, England, ever watchful of her great enemy, perceived clearly that the emperor of Austria was bent on the friendship of the great man as a blessing of heaven. Of the solemn cordiality of the emperor's feelings toward Napoleon, there remained in the soul of the czar, and the displeasure and resentment arising from extinct affection and deep-seated jealousy.

The treaty with Austria was at last signed by Napoleon on the 30th of October, Austria giving up territory to the amount of 5,000 square miles, with a population of 4,000,000, and depriving her of her last seaport. Yet, when compared with the other terms of the treaty, the victory of Wagram, the terms of which the conqueror signed the peace were universally looked upon as remarkable for moderation. Napoleon afterward expressed himself as highly culpable in having left Austria too powerful after the affair at Wagram, using the following words on that occasion: "I ought to have melted the day that I would ratify my treaty with Austria until after a previous separation of the crown of Austria, Hungary and Poland, to be placed on three different heads."

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On the 15th of February, 1809, the emperor summoned his council and announced to them that, at the expense of a colossal triumph, he devoted wholly to the welfare of the state, had resolved to separate himself from his most dear consort. "Arrived at the age of 40 years," he said, "I may conceive the hope of living sufficiently long to be in my mind and after my ideas, the children with which it shall please Providence to bless me, God knows how much this resolution has been invited to me. I should also add, that far from ever having to complain, I have on the contrary only had cause to laud the attachment and tenderness of my loved wife. She has adorned 15 years of my life with the most beautiful of will always remain graven on my heart."

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