

Folk-Tales of Napoleon eBook

Folk-Tales of Napoleon

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INTRODUCTION

Most of the literature that has its origin in the life and career of a great man may be grouped and classified under two heads: history and biography. The part that relates to the man's actions, and to the influence that such actions have had in shaping the destinies of peoples and states, belongs in the one class; while the part that derives its interest mainly from the man's personality, and deals chiefly with the mental and moral characteristics of which his actions were the outcome, goes properly into the other. The value of the literature included in these two classes depends almost wholly upon truth; that is, upon the precise correspondence of the statements made with the real facts of the man's life and career. History is worse than useless if it does not accurately chronicle and describe events; and biography is valueless and misleading if it does not truly set forth individual character.

There is, however, a kind of great-man literature in which truth is comparatively unimportant, and that is the literature of popular legend and tradition. Whether it purports to be historical or biographical, or both, it derives its interest and value from the light that it throws upon the temperament and character of the people who originate it, rather than from the amount of truth contained in the statements that it makes about the man.

The folk-tales of Napoleon Bonaparte herewith presented, if judged from the viewpoint of the historian or the biographer, are absurdly and grotesquely untrue; but to the anthropologist and the student of human nature they are extremely valuable as self-revelations of national character; and even to the historian and the biographer they have some interest as evidences of the profoundly deep impression made by Napoleon's personality upon two great peoples—the Russians and the French.

The first story, which is entitled "Napoleonder," is of Russian origin, and was put into literary form, or edited, by Alexander Amphiteatrof of St. Petersburg. It originally appeared as a feuilleton in the St. Petersburg "Gazette" of December 13, 1901. As a characteristic specimen of Russian peasant folk-lore, it seems to me to have more than ordinary interest and value. The treatment of the supernatural may seem, to Occidental readers, rather daring and irreverent, but it is perfectly in harmony with the Russian peasant's anthropomorphic conception of Deity, and should be taken with due allowance for the educational limitations of the story-teller and his auditors. The Russian muzhik often brings God and the angels into his folk-tales, and does so without the least idea of treating them disrespectfully. He makes them talk in his own language because he has no other language; and if the talk seems a little grotesque and irreverent, it is due to the low level of the narrator's literary culture, and not to any intention, on his part, of

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treating God and the angels with levity. The whole aim of the story is a moral and religious one. The narrator is trying to show that sympathy and mercy are better than selfish ambition, and that war is not only immoral but irrational. The conversation between God, the angels, and the Devil is a mere prologue, intended to bring Napoleon and Ivan-angel on the stage and lay the foundation of the plot. The story-teller's keen sense of fun and humor is shown in many little touches, but he never means to be irreverent. The whole legend is set forth in the racy, idiomatic, highly elliptical language of the common Russian muzhik, and is therefore extremely difficult of translation; but I have tried to preserve, as far as possible, the spirit and flavor of the original.

The French story was first reduced to writing—or at least put into literary form—by Honore de Balzac, and appeared under the title of “The Napoleon of the People” in the third chapter of Balzac's “Country Doctor.” It purports to be the story of Napoleon's life and career as related to a group of French peasants by one of his old soldiers—a man named Goguelat. It covers more time chronologically than the Russian story does, and deals much more fully and circumstantially with historical incidents and events: but it seems to me to be distinctly inferior to the Russian tale in power of creative imagination, unity of conception, skill of artistic treatment, and depth of human interest. The French peasant regards Napoleon merely as a great leader and conqueror, “created to be the father of soldiers,” and aided, if not directly sent, by God, to show forth the power and the glory of France. The Russian peasant, more thoughtful by nature as well as less excitable and combative in temperament, admits that Napoleon was sent on earth by God, but connects him with one of the deep problems of life by using him to show the divine nature of sympathy and pity, and the cruelty, immorality, and unreasonableness of aggressive war. The only feature that the two tales have in common is the recognition of the supernatural as a controlling factor in Napoleon's life. The French peasant believes that he had a guiding star; that he was advised and directed by a familiar spirit in the shape of a “Red Man”; and that he was saved from dangers and death by virtue of a secret compact with the Supreme Being. The Russian peasant asserts that he was created by the Devil, and that God, after having given him a soul by accident, first used him as a means of punishing the Russian people for their sins, and then made him really a man by inspiring him with the human feelings of sympathy and compassion. In the French story Napoleon appears as a great military leader, whose life and career reflect honor and glory upon France. In the Russian story he is merely the leading actor in a sort of moral drama, or historical mystery-play, intended to show the divine nature of sympathy and compassion, the immorality of war, and the essential solidarity and brotherhood of all mankind.

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George Kennan.

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NAPOLEONDER[1]

[Footnote 1: The Russian peasant's name for Napoleon Bonaparte. The final syllable "der" has perhaps been added because to the ear of the peasant "Napoleon" sounds clipped and incomplete, as "Alexan" would sound to us without the "der."]

Long ago—but not so very long ago; our grandfathers remember it—the Lord God wanted to punish the people of the world for their wickedness. So he began to think how and by what means he could punish them, and he called a council of his angels and archangels to talk about it. Says the archangel Michael to the Lord God: "Shake them up, the recreants, with an earthquake."

"We've tried that," says the Lord God. "Once upon a time we jolted to pieces Sodom and Gomorrah, but it didn't teach them anything. Since then pretty much all the towns have become Sodoms and Gomorrahs."

"How about famine?" says the archangel Gabriel.

"It would be too bad for the babies," replies the Lord God. "Famine would kill the babies. And, besides that, the cattle must have food—they're not to blame."

"Drown them with a flood," suggests Raphael.

"Clean impossible!" says the Lord God. "Because, in the first place, I took an oath once that there should be no more floods, and I set the rainbow in the sky for an assurance. In the second place, the rascally sinners have become cunning; they'll get on steamboats and sail all over the flood."

Then all the archangels were perplexed, and began to screw about in their seats, trying to invent or think of some calamity that would bring the wicked human race to its senses and stir up its conscience. But they had been accustomed, time out of mind, to do good rather than evil; they had forgotten all about the wickedness of the world; and they couldn't think of a single thing that would be of any use.

Then suddenly up comes Ivan-angel, a simple-minded soul whom the Lord God had appointed to look after the Russian muzhiks. He comes up and reports: "Lord, Satan is outside there, asking for you. He doesn't dare to come in, because he smells bad [Footnote 2: That is, he brings with him the sulphurous odor of hell.]; so he's waiting in the entry."

Then the Lord God was rejoiced. "Call Satan in!" he ordered. "I know that rogue perfectly well, and he has come in the very nick of time. A scamp like that will be sure to think of something."

Satan came in. His face was as black as tanned calfskin, his voice was hoarse, and a long tail hung down from under his overcoat.

"If you so order," he says, "I'll distribute your calamities for you with my own hands."

"Go ahead with your distribution," says the Lord God; "nobody shall hinder you."

"Will you permit me," Satan says, "to bring about an invasion of foreigners?"

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The Lord God shook his finger at Satan and cried: "Is that all you can think of? And you so wise!"

"Excuse me," Satan says. "Why doesn't my plan show wisdom?"

"Because," replies the Lord God, "you propose to afflict the people with war, and war is just what they want. They're all the time fighting among themselves, one people with another, and that's the very thing I want to punish them for."

"Yes," says Satan, "they're greedy for war, but that's only because they have never yet seen a real warrior. Send them a regular conqueror, and they'll soon drop their tails between their legs and cry, 'Have mercy, Lord! Save us from the man of blood!'"

The Lord God was surprised. "Why do you say, my little brother, that the people have never seen a real warrior? The Tsar Herod was a conqueror; the Tsar Alexander subdued a wonderful lot of people; Ivan-Tsar destroyed Kazan; Mamai-Tsar the furious came with all his hordes; and the Tsar Peter, and the great fighter Anika—how many more conquerors do you want?"

"I want Napoleonder," says Satan.

"Napoleonder!" cries the Lord God. "Who's he? Where did he come from?"

"He's a certain little man," Satan says, "who may not be wise enough to hurt, but he's terribly fierce in his habits."

The Lord God says to the archangel Gabriel: "Look in the Book of Life, Gabriel, and see if we've got Napoleonder written down."

The archangel looked and looked, but he couldn't look up any such person.

"There isn't any kind of Napoleonder in the Book," he says. "Satan is a liar. We haven't got Napoleonder written down anywhere."

Then Satan replies: "It isn't strange that you can't find Napoleonder in the Book of Life, because you write in that Book only the names of those who were born of human fathers and mothers, and who have navels. Napoleonder never had a father or a mother, and, moreover, he hasn't any navel—and that's so surprising that you might exhibit him for money."

The Lord God was greatly astonished. "How did your Napoleonder ever get into the world?" he says.

"In this way," Satan replies. "I made him, as a doll, just for amusement, out of sand. At that very time, you, Lord, happened to be washing your holy face; and, not being

careful, you let a few drops of the water of life splash over. They fell from heaven right exactly on Napoleonder's head, and he immediately took breath and became a man. He is living now, not very near nor very far away, on the island of Buan, in the middle of the ocean-sea. There is a little less than a verst of land in the island, and Napoleonder lives there and watches geese. Night and day he looks after the geese, without eating, or drinking, or sleeping, or smoking; and his only thought is—how to conquer the whole world."

The Lord God thought and thought, and then he ordered: "Bring him to me."

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Satan at once brought Napoleonder into the bright heaven. The Lord God looked at him, and saw that he was a military man with shining buttons.

"I have heard, Napoleonder," says the Lord God, "that you want to conquer the whole world."

"Exactly so," replies Napoleonder; "that's what I want very much to do."

"And have you thought," says the Lord God, "that when you go forth to conquer you will crush many peoples and shed rivers of blood?"

"That's all the same to me," says Napoleonder; "the important thing for me is—how can I subdue the whole world."

"And will you not feel pity for the killed, the wounded, the burned, the ruined, and the dead?"

"Not in the least," says Napoleonder. "Why should I feel pity? I don't like pity. So far as I can remember, I was never sorry for anybody or anything in my life, and I never shall be."

Then the Lord God turns to the angels and says: "Messrs. Angels, this seems to be the very fellow for our business." Then to Napoleonder he says: "Satan was perfectly right. You are worthy to be the instrument of my wrath, because a pitiless conqueror is worse than earthquake, famine, or deluge. Go back to the earth, Napoleonder; I turn over to you the whole world, and through you the whole world shall be punished."

Napoleonder says: "Give me armies and luck, and I'll do my best."

Then the Lord God says: "Armies you shall have, and luck you shall have; and so long as you are merciless you shall never be defeated in battle; but remember that the moment you begin to feel sorry for the shedding of blood—of your own people or of others—that moment your power will end. From that moment your enemies will defeat you, and you shall finally be made a prisoner, be put into chains, and be sent back to Buan Island to watch geese. Do you understand?"

"Exactly so," says Napoleonder. "I understand, and I will obey. I shall never feel pity."

Then the angels and the archangels began to say to God: "Lord, why have you laid upon him such a frightful command? If he goes forth so, without mercy, he will kill every living soul on earth—he will leave none for seed!"

"Be silent!" replied the Lord God. "He will not conquer long. He is altogether too brave; because he fears neither others nor himself. He thinks he will keep from pity, and does

not know that pity, in the human heart, is stronger than all else, and that not a man living is wholly without it.”

“But,” the archangels say, “he is not a man; he is made of sand.”

The Lord God replies: “Then you think he didn’t receive a soul when my water of life fell on his head?”

Napoleonder at once gathered together a great army speaking twelve languages, and went forth to war. He conquered the Germans, he conquered the Turks, he subdued the Swedes and the Poles. He reaped as he marched, and left bare the country through which he passed. And all the time he remembers the condition of success—pity for none. He cuts off heads, burns villages, outrages women, and tramples children under his horses’ hoofs. He desolates the whole Mohammedan kingdom—and still he is not sated. Finally he marches on a Christian country—on Holy Russia.

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In Russia then the Tsar was Alexander the Blessed—the same Tsar who stands now on the top of the column in Petersburg-town and blesses the people with a cross, and that's why he is called “the Blessed.”

When he saw Napoleonder marching against him with twelve languages, Alexander the Blessed felt that the end of Russia was near. He called together his generals and field-marshals, and said to them: “Messrs. Generals and Field-marshals, how can I check this Napoleonder? He is pressing us terribly hard.”

The generals and field-marshals reply: “We can't do anything, your Majesty, to stop Napoleonder, because God has given him a word.”

“What kind of a word?”

“This kind: ‘Bonaparty.’”

“But what does ‘Bonaparty’ mean, and why is a single word so terrible?”

“It means, your Majesty, six hundred and sixty-six—the number of the Beast [Footnote 3: A reference to the Beast of the Apocalypse. “The number of the beast is the number of a man: and his number is Six hundred threescore and six” (Rev. xiii. 18).]; and it is terrible because when Napoleonder sees, in a battle, that the enemy is very brave, that his own strength is not enough, and that his own men are falling fast [Footnote 4: Literally, “lying down with their bones.”], he immediately conjures with this same word, ‘Bonaparty,’ and at that instant—as soon as the word is pronounced—all the soldiers that have ever served under him and have died for him on the field of battle come back from beyond the grave. He leads them afresh against the enemy, as if they were alive, and nothing can stand against them, because they are a ghostly force, not an army of this world.”

Alexander the Blessed grew sad; but, after thinking a moment, he said: “Messrs. Generals and Field-marshals, we Russians are a people of more than ordinary courage. We have fought with all nations, and never yet before any of them have we laid our faces in the dust. If God has brought us, at last, to fight with corpses—his holy will be done! We will go against the dead!”

So he led his army to the field of Kulikova, and there waited for the miscreant Napoleonder. And soon afterward, Napoleonder, the evil one, sends him an envoy with a paper saying, “Submit, Alexander Blagoslovenni, and I will show you favor above all others.”

But Alexander the Blessed was a proud man, who held fast his self-respect. He would not speak to the envoy, but he took the paper that the envoy had brought, and drew on

it an insulting picture, with the words, "Is this what you want?" and sent it back to Napoleonder.

Then they fought and slashed one another on the field of Kulikova, and in a short time or a long time our men began to overcome the forces of the enemy. One by one they shot or cut down all of Napoleonder's field-m Marshals, and finally drew near to Napoleonder himself.

"Your time has come!" they cry to him. "Surrender!"

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But the villain sits there on his horse, rolling his goggle-eyes like an owl, and grinning.

“Wait a minute,” he says coolly. “Don’t be in too big a hurry. A tale is short in telling, but the deed is long a-doing.”

Then he pronounces his conjuring-word, “Bonaparty”—six hundred and sixty-six, the number of the Beast.

Instantly there is a great rushing sound, and the earth is shaken as if by an earthquake. Our soldiers look—and drop their hands. In all parts of the field appear threatening battalions, with bayonets shining in the sun, torn flags waving over terrible hats of fur, and tramp! tramp! tramp! on come the thousands of phantom men, with faces yellow as camomile, and empty holes under their bushy eyebrows.

Alexander, the Blessed Tsar, was stricken with terror. Terror-stricken were all his generals and field-marsals. Terror-stricken also was the whole Russian army. Shaking with fear, they wavered at the advance of the dead, gave way suddenly in a panic, and finally fled in whatever direction their eyes happened to look.

The brigand Napoleonder sat on his horse, holding his sides with laughter, and shouted: “Aha! My old men are not to your taste! I thought so! This isn’t like playing knuckle-bones with children and old women! Well, then, my honorable Messrs. Dead Men, I have never yet felt pity for any one, and you needn’t show mercy to my enemies. Deal with them after your own fashion.”

“As long as it is so,” replied the corpse-soldiers, “we are your faithful servants always.”

Our men fled from Kulikova-field to Pultava-field; from Pultava-field to the famous still-water Don; and from the peaceful Don to the field of Borodino, under the very walls of Mother Moscow. And as our men came to these fields, one after another, they turned their faces again and again toward Napoleonder, and fought him with such fierceness that the brigand himself was delighted with them “God save us!” he exclaimed, “what soldiers these Russians are! I have not seen such men in any other country.”

But, in spite of the bravery of our troops, we were unable to stop Napoleonder’s march; because we had no word with which to meet his word. In every battle we pound him, and drive him back, and get him in a slip-noose; but just as we are going to draw it tight and catch him, the filthy, idolatrous thief bethinks himself and shouts “Bonaparty!” Then the dead men crawl out of their graves in full uniform, set their teeth, fix their eyes upon their officers, and charge! And where they pass the grass withers and the stones crack. And our men are so terrified by these unclean bodies that they can’t fight against them at all. As soon as they hear that accursed word “Bonaparty,” and see the big fur hats and the yellow faces of the dead men, they throw down their guns and rush into the woods to hide.

“Say what you will, Alexander Blagoslovenni,” they cry, “for corpses we are not prepared.”

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Alexander the Blessed reproached his men, and said: "Wait a little, brothers, before you run away. Let's exert ourselves a little more. Dog that he is, he can't beat us always. God has set a limit for him somewhere. To-day is his, to-morrow may be his, but after a while the luck perhaps will turn."

Then he went to the old hermit-monks in the caves of Kiev and on the island of Valaam, and bowed himself at the feet of all the archimandrites and metropolitans, saying: "Pray for us, holy fathers, and beseech the Lord God to turn away his wrath; because we haven't strength enough to defend you from this Napoleonder."

Then the old hermit-monks and the archimandrites and the metropolitans all prayed, with tears in their eyes, to the Lord God, and prostrated themselves until their knees were all black and blue and there were big bumps on their foreheads. With tearful eyes, the whole Russian people, too, from the Tsar to the last beggar, prayed God for mercy and help. And they took the sacred ikon of the Holy Mother of God of Smolensk, the pleader for the grief-stricken, and carried it to the famous field of Borodino, and, bowing down before it, with tearful eyes, they cried: "O Most Holy Mother of God, thou art our life and our hope! Have mercy on us, and intercede for us soon."

And down the dark face of the ikon, from under the setting of pearls in the silver frame, trickled big tears. And all the army and all God's people saw the sacred ikon crying. It was a terrible thing to see, but it was comforting.

Then the Lord God heard the wail of the Russian people and the prayers of the Holy Virgin the Mother of God of Smolensk, and he cried out to the angels and the archangels: "The hour of my wrath has passed. The people have suffered enough for their sins and have repented of their wickedness. Napoleonder has destroyed nations enough. It's time for him to learn mercy. Who of you, my servants, will go down to the earth—who will undertake the great work of softening the conqueror's heart?"

The older angels and the archangels didn't want to go. "Soften his heart!" they cried. "He is made of sand—he hasn't any navel—he is pitiless—we're afraid of him!"

Then Ivan-angel stepped forward and said: "I'll go."

At that very time Napoleonder had just gained a great victory and was riding over the field of battle on a greyhound of a horse. He trampled with his horse's hoofs on the bodies of the dead, without pity or regret, and the only thought in his mind was, "As soon as I have done with Russia, I'll march against the Chinese and the white Arabs; and then I shall have conquered exactly the whole world."

But just at that moment he heard some one calling, "Napoleonder! O Napoleonder!" He looked around, and not far away, under a bush on a little mound, he saw a wounded Russian soldier, who was beckoning to him with his hand. Napoleonder was surprised.

What could a wounded Russian soldier want of him? He turned his horse and rode to the spot. "What do you want?" he asked the soldier.

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"I don't want anything of you," the wounded soldier replied, "except an answer to one question. Tell me, please, what have you killed me for?"

Napoleonder was still more surprised. In the many years of his conquering he had wounded and killed a multitude of men; but he had never been asked that question before. And yet this Russian soldier didn't look as if he had anything more than ordinary intelligence. He was just a young, boyish fellow, with light flaxen hair and blue eyes—evidently a new recruit from some country village.

"What do you mean—'killed you for'?" said Napoleonder. "I had to kill you. When you went into the army, didn't you take an oath that you would die?"

"I know what oath I took, Napoleonder, and I'm not making a fuss about dying. But you—why did you kill me?"

"Why shouldn't I kill you," said Napoleonder, "when you were the enemy,—that is, my foe,—come out to fight me on the field of Borodino?"

"Cross yourself, Napoleonder!" said the young soldier. "How could I be your foe, when there has never been any sort of quarrel between us? Until you came into our country, and I was drafted into the army, I had never even heard of you. And here you have killed me—and how many more like me!"

"I killed," said Napoleonder, "because it was necessary for me to conquer the world."

"But what have I got to do with your conquering the world?" replied the soldier. "Conquer it, if you want to—I don't hinder. But why did you kill me? Has killing me given you the world? The world doesn't belong to me. You're not reasonable, brother Napoleonder. And is it possible that you really think you can conquer the whole world?"

"I'm very much of that opinion," replied Napoleonder.

The little soldier smiled. "You're really stupid, Napoleonder," he said. "I'm sorry for you. As if it were possible to conquer the whole world!"

"I'll subdue all the kingdoms," replied Napoleonder, "and put all peoples in chains, and then I'll reign as Tsar of all the earth."

The soldier shook his head. "And God?" he inquired. "Will you conquer him?"

Napoleonder was confused. "No," he finally said. "God's will is over us all; and in the hollow of his hand we live."

“Then what’s the use of your conquering the world?” said the soldier. “God is all; therefore the world won’t belong to you, but to him. And you’ll live just so long as he has patience with you, and no longer.”

“I know that as well as you do,” said Napoleonder.

“Well, then,” replied the soldier, “if you know it, why don’t you reckon with God?”

Napoleonder scowled. “Don’t say such things to me!” he cried. “I’ve heard that sanctimonious stuff before. It’s of no use. You can’t fool me! I don’t know any such thing as pity.”

“Indeed,” said the soldier, “is it so? Have a care, Napoleonder! You are swaggering too much. You lie when you say a man can live without pity. To have a soul, and to feel compassion, are one and the same thing. You have a soul, haven’t you?”

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"Of course I have," replied Napoleonder; "a man can't live without a soul."

"There! you see!" said the soldier. "You have a soul, and you believe in God. How, then, can you say you don't know any such thing as pity? You do know! And I believe that at this very moment, deep down in your heart, you are mortally sorry for me; only you don't want to show it. Why, then, did you kill me?"

Napoleonder suddenly became furious. "May the pip seize your tongue, you miscreant! I'll show you how much pity I have for you!" And, drawing a pistol, Napoleonder shot the wounded soldier through the head. Then, turning to his dead men, he said: "Did you see that?"

"We saw it," they replied; "and as long as it is so, we are your faithful servants always."

Napoleonder rode on.

At last night comes; and Napoleonder is sitting alone in his golden tent. His mind is troubled, and he can't understand what it is that seems to be gnawing at his heart. For years he has been at war, and this is the first time such a thing has happened. Never before has his soul been so filled with unrest. And to-morrow morning he must begin another battle—the last terrible fight with the Tsar Alexander the Blessed, on the field of Borodino.

"Akh!" he thinks, "I'll show them to-morrow what a leader I am! I'll lift the soldiers of the Tsar into the air on my lances and trample their bodies under the feet of my horses. I'll make the Tsar himself a prisoner, and I'll kill or scatter the whole Russian people."

But a voice seemed to whisper in his ear: "And why? Why?"

"I know that trick," he thought. "It's that same wounded soldier again. All right. I won't give in to him. 'Why? Why?' As if I knew why! Perhaps if I knew why I shouldn't make war."

He lay down on his bed; but hardly had he closed his eyes when he saw by his bedside the wounded soldier—young, fair-faced, blond-haired, with just the first faint shadow of a mustache. His forehead was pale, his lips were livid, his blue eyes were dim, and in his left temple there was a round black hole made by the bullet from his—Napoleonder's—pistol. And the ghastly figure seemed to ask again, "Why did you kill me?"

Napoleonder turns over and over, from side to side, in his bed. He sees that it's a bad business. He can't get rid of that soldier. And, more than all, he wonders at himself. "What an extraordinary occurrence!" he thinks. "I've killed millions of people, of all countries and nations, without the least misgiving; and now, suddenly, one miserable soldier comes and throws all my ideas into a tangle!"

Finally Napoleon got up; but the confinement of his golden tent seemed oppressive. He went out into the open air, mounted his horse, and rode away to the place where he had shot to death the vexatious soldier.

"I've heard," he said to himself, "that when a dead man appears in a vision, it is necessary to sprinkle earth on the eyes of the corpse; then he'll lie quiet."

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Napoleonder rides on. The moon is shining brightly, and the bodies of the dead are lying on the battle-field in heaps. Everywhere he sees corruption and smells corruption.

“And all these,” he thought, “I have killed.”

And, wonderful to say, it seems to him as if all the dead men have the same face,—a young face with blue eyes, and blond hair, and the faint shadow of a mustache,—and they all seem to be looking at him with kindly, pitying eyes, and their bloodless lips move just a little as they ask, without anger or reproach, “Why? Why?”

Napoleonder felt a dull, heavy pressure at his heart. He had not spirit enough left to go to the little mound where the body of the dead soldier lay, so he turned his horse and rode back to his tent; and every corpse that he passed seemed to say, “Why? Why?”

He no longer felt the desire to ride at a gallop over the dead bodies of the Russian soldiers. On the contrary, he picked his way among them carefully, riding respectfully around the remains of every man who had died with honor on that field of blood; and now and then he even crossed himself and said: “Akh, that one ought to have lived! What a fine fellow that one was! He must have fought with splendid courage. And I killed him—why?”

The great conqueror never noticed that his heart was growing softer and warmer, but so it was. He pitied his dead enemies at last, and then the evil spirit went away from him, and left him in all respects like other people.

The next day came the battle. Napoleonder led his forces, cloud upon cloud, to the field of Borodino; but he was shaking as if in a chill. His generals and field-m Marshals looked at him and were filled with dismay.

“You ought to take a drink of vodka, Napoleonder,” they say; “you don’t look like yourself.”

When the Russian troops attacked the hordes of Napoleonder, on the field of Borodino, the soldiers of the great conqueror at once gave way.

“It’s a bad business, Napoleonder,” the generals and field-m Marshals say. “For some reason the Russians are fighting harder to-day than ever. You’d better call out your dead men.”

Napoleonder shouted at the top of his voice, “Bonaparty!”—six hundred and sixty-six,—the number of the Beast. But, cry as he would, he only frightened the jackdaws. The dead men didn’t come out of their graves, nor answer his call. And Napoleonder was left on the field of Borodino alone. All his generals and field-m Marshals had fled, and he sat there alone on his horse, shouting, “Bonaparty! Bonaparty!”

Then suddenly there appeared beside him the smooth-faced, blue-eyed, fair-haired Russian recruit whom he had killed the day before. And the young soldier said: "It's useless to shout, Napoleonder. Nobody will come. Yesterday you felt sorry for me and for my dead brothers, and because of your pity your corpse-soldiers no longer come at your call. Your power over them is gone."

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Then Napoleonder began to weep and sob, and cried out, “You have ruined me, you wretched, miserable soldier!”

But the soldier (who was Ivan-angel, and not a soldier at all) replied: “I have not ruined you, Napoleonder; I have saved you. If you had gone on in your merciless, pitiless course, there would have been no forgiveness for you, either in this life or in the life to come. Now God has given you time for repentance. In this world you shall be punished; but there, beyond, if you repent of your sins, you shall be forgiven.”

And the angel vanished.

Then our Don Cossacks fell on Napoleonder, dragged him from his horse, and took him to Alexander the Blessed. Some said, “Napoleonder ought to be shot!” Others cried, “Send him to Siberia to!” But the Lord God softened the heart of Alexander the Blessed, and the merciful Tsar would not allow Napoleonder to be shot or sent to Siberia. He ordered that the great conqueror be put into an iron cage, and be carried around and exhibited to the people at country fairs. So Napoleonder was carried from one fair to another for a period of thirty summers and three years—until he had grown quite old. Then, when he was an old man, they sent him to the island of Buan to watch geese.

* * * * *

THE NAPOLEON OF THE PEOPLE[1]

[Footnote 1: A story told to a group of French peasants one evening, in a barn, by Goguelat, the village postman, who had served under Napoleon in a regiment of infantry.]

Napoleon, my friends, was born, you know, in Corsica. That’s a French island, but it’s warmed by the sun of Italy, and everything’s as hot there as if it were a furnace. It’s a place, too, where the people kill one another, from father to son, generation after generation, for nothing at all; that is, for no reason in particular except that it’s their way.

Well, to begin with the most wonderful part of the story, it so happened that on the very day when Napoleon was born, his mother dreamed that the world was on fire. She was a shrewd, clever woman, as well as the prettiest woman of her time; and when she had this dream, she thought she’d save her son from the dangers of life by dedicating him to God. And, indeed, that was a prophetic dream of hers! So she asked God to protect the boy, and promised that when he grew up he should reestablish God’s holy religion, which had then been overthrown. That was the agreement they made; and although it seems strange, such things have happened. It’s sure and certain, anyhow, that only a man who had an agreement with God could pass through the enemy’s lines, and move about in showers of bullets and grape-shot, as Napoleon did. They swept us away like

flies, but his head they never touched at all. I had a proof of that—I myself, in particular—at Eylau, where the Emperor went up on a little hill to see how things were going. I can remember,

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to this day, exactly how he looked as he took out his field-glass, watched the battle for a minute, and finally said: "It's all right! Everything is going well." Then, just as he was coming back, an ambitious chap in a plumed hat, who was always following him around, and who bothered him, they said, even at his meals, thought he'd play smart by going up on the very same hill; but he had hardly taken the Emperor's place when—batz!—away he went, plume and all!

Now follow me closely, and tell me whether what you are going to hear was natural.

Napoleon, you know, had promised that he'd keep his agreement with God to himself. That's the reason why his companions and even his particular friends—men like Duroc, Bessieres, and Lannes, who were strong as bars of steel, but whom he molded to suit his purposes—all fell, like nuts from a shaken tree, while he himself was never even hurt.

But that's not the only proof that he was the child of God and was expressly created to be the father of soldiers. Did anybody ever see him a lieutenant? Or a captain? Never! He was commander-in-chief from the start. When he didn't look more than twenty-four years of age he was already an old general—ever since the taking of Toulon, where he first began to show the rest of them that they didn't know anything about the handling of cannon.

Well, soon after that, down comes this stripling to us as general-in-chief of the Army of Italy—an army that hadn't any ammunition, or bread, or shoes, or coats; a wretched army—naked as a worm. "Now, boys!" he said, "here we are, all together. I want you to get it fixed in your heads that in fifteen days more you 're going to be conquerors. You're going to have new clothes, good leggings, the best of shoes, and a warm overcoat for every man; but in order to get these things you'll have to march to Milan, where they are." So we marched. We were only thirty thousand bare-footed tramps, and we were going against eighty thousand crack German soldiers—fine, well equipped men; but Napoleon, who was only Bonaparte then, breathed a spirit of—I don't know what—into us, and on we marched, night and day. We hit the enemy at Montenotte, thrashed 'em at Rivoli, Lodi, Arcola, and Millesimo, and stuck to 'em wherever they went. A soldier soon gets to like being a conqueror; and Napoleon wheeled around those German generals, and pelted away at 'em, until they didn't know where to hide long enough to get a little rest. With fifteen hundred Frenchmen, whom he made to appear a great host (that's a way he had), he'd sometimes surround ten thousand men and gather 'em all in at a single scoop. Then we'd take their cannon, their money, their ammunition, and everything they had that was worth carrying away. As for the others, we chucked 'em into the water, walloped 'em on the mountains, snapped 'em up in the air, devoured 'em on the ground, and beat 'em everywhere. So at last our troops were in fine feather—especially as Napoleon, who had a clever wit, made friends with the

inhabitants of the country by telling them that we had come to set them free; and then, of course, they gave us quarters and took the best of care of us. And it was not only the men: the women took care of us too, which showed their good judgment!

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Well, it finally ended in this way: in Ventose, 1796,—which was the same time of year that our March is now,—we were penned up in one corner of the marmot country: but at the end of the first campaign, lo and behold! we were masters of Italy, just as Napoleon had predicted. And in the month of March following—that is, in two campaigns, which we fought in a single year—he brought us in sight of Vienna. It was just a clean sweep. We had eaten up three different armies in succession, and had wiped out four Austrian generals; one of them—a white-haired old chap—was burned alive at Mantua like a rat in a straw mattress. We had conquered peace, and kings were begging, on their knees, for mercy. Could a man have done all that alone? Never! He had the help of God; that's certain! He divided himself up like the five loaves of bread in the Gospel; he planned battles at night and directed them in the daytime: he was seen by the sentries going here and there at all hours, and he never ate or slept. When the soldiers saw all these wonderful things, they adopted him as their father.

But the people at the head of the government over there in Paris, who were looking on, said to themselves: “This schemer, who seems to have the watchword of Heaven, is quite capable of laying his hands on France. We'd better turn him loose in Asia or America. Then maybe he'll be satisfied for a while.” So it was written that he should do just what Jesus Christ did—go to Egypt. You see how in this he resembled the Son of God. But there's more to come.

He gathered together all his old fire-eaters—the fellows that he had put the spirit of the Devil into—and said to them: “Boys! They've given us Egypt to chew on—to keep us quiet for a while; but we'll swallow Egypt in one time and two movements—just as we did Italy; All you private soldiers shall be princes, with lands of your own. Forward!”

“Forward, boys!” shouted the sergeants.

So we marched to Toulon, on our way to Egypt. As soon as the English heard of it, they sent out all their ships of war to catch us; but when we embarked, Napoleon said to us: “The English will never see us; and it is only proper for you to know now that your general has a star in the sky which will henceforth guide and protect us.”

As 't was said, so 't was done. On our way across the sea we took Malta (just as one would pick an orange in passing) to quench Napoleon's thirst for victory; because he was a man who wanted to be doing something all the time.

And so at last we came to Egypt; and then the orders were different. The Egyptians, you know, are people who, from the beginning of the world, have had giants to rule over them, and armies like innumerable ants. Their country is a land of genii and crocodiles, and of pyramids as big as our mountains, where they put the bodies of their dead kings to keep them fresh—a thing that seems to please them all around. Of

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course you can't deal with such people as you would with others. So when we landed, the Little Corporal said to us: "Boys! The country that you are going to conquer worships a lot of gods that must be respected. Frenchmen should keep on good terms with everybody, and fight people without hurting their feelings. So let everything alone at first, and by and by we'll get all there is."

Now there was a prediction among the Egyptians down there that Napoleon would come; and the name they had for him was Kebir Bonaberdis, which means, in their lingo, "The Sultan strikes fire." They were as much afraid of him as they were of the Devil; so the Grand Turk, Asia, and Africa resorted to magic, and sent against us a demon named Mody [the Mahdi], who was supposed to have come down from heaven on a white horse. This horse was incombustible to bullets, and so was the Mody, and the two of 'em lived on weather and air. There are people who have seen 'em; but I haven't any reason, myself, to say positively that the things told about 'em were true. Anyhow, they were the great powers in Arabia; and the Mamelukes wanted to make the Egyptian soldiers think that the Mody could keep them from being killed in battle, and that he was an angel sent down from heaven to fight Napoleon and get back Solomon's seal—a part of their equipment which they pretended to believe our general had stolen. But we made 'em laugh on the wrong side of their mouths, in spite of their Mody!

They thought Napoleon could command the genii, and that he had power to go from one place to another in an instant, like a bird; and, indeed, it's a fact that he was everywhere. But how did they know that he had an agreement with God? Was it natural that they should get such an idea as that?

It so happened, finally, that he carried off one of their queens—a woman beautiful as the sunshine. He tried, at first, to buy her, and offered to give for her all his treasure, and a lot of diamonds as big as pigeons' eggs; but although the Mameluke to whom she particularly belonged had several others, he wouldn't agree to the bargain; so Napoleon had to carry her off. Of course, when things came to such a pass as that, they couldn't be settled without a lot of fighting; and if there weren't blows enough to satisfy all, it wasn't anybody's fault. We formed in battle line at Alexandria, at Gizeh, and in front of the Pyramids. We marched in hot sunshine and through deep sand, where some got so bedazzled that they saw water which they couldn't drink, and shade that made them sweat; but we generally chewed up the Mamelukes, and all the rest gave in when they heard Napoleon's voice.

He took possession of Upper and Lower Egypt, Arabia, and the capitals of kingdoms that perished long ago, where there were thousands of statues of all the evil things in creation, especially lizards—a thundering big country, where one could get acres of land for as little as he pleased.

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Well, while Napoleon was attending to his business inland, where he intended to do some splendid things, the English, who were always trying to make us trouble, burned his fleet at Aboukir. But our general, who had the respect of the East and the West, who had been called “my son” by the Pope, and “my dear father” by the cousin of Mahomet, resolved to punish England, and to capture the Indies, in payment for his lost fleet. He was just going to take us across the Red Sea into Asia—a country where there were lots of diamonds, plenty of gold with which to pay his soldiers, and palaces that could be used for etapes—when the Mody made an arrangement with the Plague, and sent it down to put an end to our victories. Then it was, Halt, all! And everybody marched off to that parade from which you don’t come back on your feet. Dying soldiers couldn’t take Saint Jean d’Acre, although they forced an entrance three times with noble and stubborn courage. The Plague was too strong for us; and it wasn’t any use to say “Please don’t!” to the Plague. Everybody was sick except Napoleon. He looked fresh as a rose, and the whole army saw him drinking in pestilence without being hurt a bit. How was that? Do you call that natural?

Well, the Mamelukes, who knew that we were all in ambulances, thought they’d bar our way; but they couldn’t play that sort of game with Napoleon. He turned to his old fire-eaters—the fellows with the toughest hides—and said: “Go clear the road for me.” Junot, who was his devoted friend and a number one soldier, took not more than a thousand men, and slashed right through the army of the pasha which had had the impudence to get in our way. Then we went back to Cairo, where we had our headquarters.

And now for another part of the story. While Napoleon was away France was letting herself be ruined by those government scalawags in Paris, who were keeping back the soldiers’ pay, withholding their linen and their clothes, and even letting them starve. They wanted the soldiers to lay down the law to the universe, and that’s all they cared for. They were just a lot of idiots jabbering for amusement instead of putting their own hands into the dough. So our armies were beaten and we couldn’t defend, our frontiers. *The man* was no longer there. I say “the man” because that’s what they called him; but it was absurd to say that he was merely a man, when he had a star of his own with all its belongings. It was the rest of us who were merely men. At the battle of Aboukir, with a single division and with a loss of only three hundred men, he whipped the great army of the Turks, and hustled more than half of them into the sea—r-r-rah—like that! But it was his last thunderclap in Egypt; because when he heard, soon afterward, what was happening in France, he made up his mind to go back there. “I am the savior of France,” he said, “and I must go to her aid.” The army didn’t know what he intended to do. If they had known, they would have kept him in Egypt by force and made him Emperor of the East.

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When he had gone, we all felt very blue; because he had been the joy of our lives. He left the command to Kleber—a great lout of a fellow who soon afterward lost the number of his mess. An Egyptian assassinated him. They put the murderer to death by making him sit on a bayonet; that's their way, down there, of guillotining a man. But he suffered so much that one of our soldiers felt sorry for him and offered him his water-gourd. The criminal took a drink, and then gave up the ghost with the greatest pleasure.

But we didn't waste much time over trifles like that.

Napoleon sailed from Egypt in a cockle-shell of a boat called *Fortune*. He passed right under the noses of the English, who were blockading the coast with ships of the line, frigates, and every sort of craft that could carry sail, and in the twinkling of an eye he was in France; because he had the ability to cross the sea as if with a single stride. Was that natural? Bah! The very minute he reached Frejus, he had his foot, so to speak, in Paris. There, of course, everybody worships him. But the first thing he does is to summon the government. "What have you been doing with my children the soldiers?" he said to the lawyers. "You are nothing but a lot of poll-parrots, who fool the people with your gabble, and feather your own nests at the expense of France. It is not right; and I speak in the name of all who are dissatisfied."

They thought, at first, that they could get rid of him by talking him to death; but it didn't work. He shut 'em up in the very barrack where they did their talking, and those who didn't jump out of the windows he enrolled in his suite, where they soon became mute as fish and pliable as a tobacco-pouch. This coup made him consul; and as he wasn't one to doubt the Supreme Being who had kept good faith with him, he hastened to fulfil his own promise by restoring the churches and reestablishing religion; whereupon the bells all rang out in his honor and in honor of the good God.

Everybody then was satisfied: first, the priests, because they were protected from persecution; second, the merchants, because they could do business without fearing the "we-grab-it-all" of the law; and finally the nobles, because the people were forbidden to put them to death, as they had formerly had the unfortunate habit of doing.

But Napoleon still had his enemies to clear away, and he was not a man to drop asleep over his porringer. His eye took in the whole world—as if it were no bigger than a soldier's head. The first thing he did was to turn up in Italy—as suddenly as if he had poked his head through a window; and one look from him was enough. The Austrians were swallowed up at Marengo as gudgeons are swallowed by a whale. Then the French *victory* sang a song of triumph that all the world could hear, and it was enough. "We won't play any more!" declared the Germans.

"Nor we either," said the others.

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Sum total: Europe is cowed; England knuckles down; and there is universal peace, with all the kings and people pretending to embrace one another.

It was then that Napoleon established the Legion of Honor; and a fine thing it was, too. In a speech that he made before the whole army at Boulogne he said: "In France everybody is brave; so the civilian who does a noble deed shall be the brother of the soldier, and they shall stand together under the flag of honor." Then we who had been down in Egypt came home and found everything changed. When Napoleon left us he was only a general; but in no time at all he had become Emperor. France had given herself to him as a pretty girl gives herself to a lancer.

Well, when everything had been settled to everybody's satisfaction, there was a religious ceremony such as had never before been seen under the canopy of heaven. The Pope and all his cardinals, in their robes of scarlet and gold, came across the Alps to anoint him with holy oil, and he was crowned Emperor, in the presence of the army and the people, with great applause and clapping of hands.

But there is one thing that it would not be fair not to tell you; and that is about the *red man*. While Napoleon was still in Egypt, in a desert not far from Syria, the Red Man appeared to him on the mountain of Moses (Sinai), and said to him, "It's all right!" Then again, at Marengo, on the evening of the victory, the same Red Man appeared to him a second time, and said: "You shall see the world at your feet: you shall be Emperor of France; King of Italy; master of Holland; sovereign of Spain, Portugal, and the Illyrian provinces; protector of Germany; savior of Poland; first eagle of the Legion of Honor—everything!"

This Red Man, you see, was his own idea; and was a sort of messenger whom he used, many people said, as a means of communication with his star. I've never believed that, myself, but that there was a Red Man is a real fact. Napoleon himself spoke of him, and said that he lived up under the roof in the palace of the Tuileries, and that he often used to make his appearance in times of trouble. On the evening of his coronation Napoleon saw him for the third time, and they consulted together about a lot of things.

After that the Emperor went to Milan, where he was crowned King of Italy; and then began a regular triumph for us soldiers. Every man who knew how to read and write became an officer; it rained dukedoms; pensions were distributed with both hands; there were fortunes for the general staff which didn't cost France a penny; and even common soldiers received annuities with their crosses of the Legion of Honor—I get mine to this day. In short, the armies of France were taken care of in a way that had never before been seen.

But the Emperor, who knew that he was the emperor not only of the soldiers but of all, remembered the bourgeois, and built wonderful monuments for them, to suit their own taste, in places that had been as bare before as the palm of your hand. Suppose you

were coming from Spain, for example, and going through France to Berlin. You would pass under sculptured triumphal arches on which you'd see the common soldiers carved just as beautifully as the generals.

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In two or three years, and without taxing you people at all, Napoleon filled his vaults with gold; created bridges, palaces, roads, schools, festivals, laws, harbors, ships; and spent millions and millions of money—so much, in fact, that if he'd taken the notion, they say, he might have paved all France with five-franc pieces.

Finally, when he was comfortably seated on his throne, he was so thoroughly the master of everything that Europe waited for his permission before it even dared to sneeze. Then, as he had four brothers and three sisters, he said to us in familiar talk, as if in the order of the day: “Boys! Is it right that the relatives of your Emperor should have to beg their bread? No! I want them to shine, just as I do. A kingdom must be conquered, therefore, for every one of them; so that France may be master of all; so that the soldiers of the Guard may make the world tremble; so that France may spit wherever she likes; and so that all nations may say to her,—as it is written on my coins,—‘God protects you.’”

“All right!” says the army. “We’ll fish up kingdoms for you with the bayonet.”

We couldn’t back out, you know; and if he had taken it into his head to conquer the moon, we should have had to get ready, pack our knapsacks, and climb up. Fortunately, he didn’t have any such intention.

The kings, who were very comfortable on their thrones, naturally didn’t want to get off to make room for his relatives; so they had to be dragged off by the ears. Forward! We marched and marched, and everything began to shake again. Ah, how he did wear out men and shoes in those days! He struck such tremendous blows with us that if we had been other than Frenchmen we should all have been used up. But Frenchmen are born philosophers, and they know that a little sooner or a little later they must die. So we used to die without a word, because we had the pleasure of seeing the Emperor do this with the geographies. [Here the old soldier nimbly drew a circle with his foot on the floor of the barn.]

“There!” he would say, “that shall be a kingdom!” And it was a kingdom. Ah, that was a great time! Colonels became generals while you were looking at them; generals became marshals, and marshals became kings. There’s one of those kings still left, to remind Europe of that time; but he is a Gascon, and has betrayed France in order to keep his crown. He doesn’t blush for the shame of it, either; because crowns, you understand, are made of gold! Finally, even sappers, if they knew how to read, became nobles all the same. I myself have seen in Paris eleven kings and a crowd of princes, surrounding Napoleon like rays of the sun. Every soldier had a chance to see how a throne fitted him, if he was worthy of it, and when a corporal of the Guard passed by he was an object of curiosity; because all had a share in the glory of the victories, which were perfectly well known to everybody through the bulletins.

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And what a lot of battles there were! Austerlitz, where the army maneuvered as if on parade; Eylau, where the Russians were drowned in a lake as if Napoleon had blown them in with a single puff; Wagram, where we fought three days without flinching. In short, there were as many battles as there are saints in the calendar. And it was proved then that Napoleon had in his scabbard the real sword of God. He felt regard for his soldiers, too, and treated them just as if they were his children, always taking pains to find out if they were well supplied with shoes, linen, overcoats, bread, and cartridges. But he kept up his dignity as sovereign all the same; because to reign was his business. However, that didn't make any difference. A sergeant, or even a common soldier, could say to him "Emperor," just as you sometimes say "my dear fellow" to me. He was one that you could argue with, if necessary; he slept on the snow with the rest of us; and, in short, he appeared almost like any other man. But when the grape-shot were kicking up the dust at his very feet, I have seen him going about coolly,—no more disturbed by them than you are at this minute,—looking through his field-glass now and then, and attending all the time to his business. Of course that made the rest of us as calm and serene as John the Baptist. I don't know how he managed it, but when he spoke to us, his words put fire into our hearts; and in order to show him that we really were his children, and not the kind of men to shrink from danger, we used to march right up to great blackguards of cannon which bellowed and vomited balls without so much as saying "Look out!" Even dying men had the nerve to raise their heads and salute him with the cry of "Long live the Emperor!" Was that natural? Would they have done that for a mere man?

Well, when he had settled all his folks comfortably, the Empress Josephine—who was a good woman all the same—was so fixed that she couldn't give him any family, and he had to leave her. He loved her quite a little, too; but for reasons of state he had to have children. When the kings of Europe heard of this trouble, they came to blows over the question who should give him a wife. He finally married, they told us, an Austrian woman. She was a daughter of Caesar's—a man of ancient times who is much talked about, not only in our country, where they say he made everything, but in Europe. It's true, anyhow, that I have myself been on the Danube, and have seen there the remains of a bridge that this man Caesar built. It appears that he was a relative of Napoleon's in Rome, and that's why the Emperor had a right to take the inheritance there for his son.

Well, after his marriage, when there was a holiday for the whole world, and when he let the people off ten years' taxes (which were collected all the same, because the tax-gatherers didn't pay any attention to what he said), his wife had a little boy who was King of Rome. That was a thing which had never been seen on earth before—a child born king while his father was still living. A balloon was sent up in Paris to carry the news to Rome, and it made the whole distance in a single day. Now will any of you tell me that that was natural? Never! It had been so written on high.

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Well, next comes the Emperor of Russia. He had once been Napoleon's friend; but he got angry because our Emperor didn't marry a Russian woman. So he backs up our enemies the English. Napoleon had long intended to pay his respects to those English ducks in their own nests, but something had always happened to prevent, and it was now high time to make an end of them. So he finally got angry himself, and said to us: "Soldiers! You have been masters of all the capitals of Europe except Moscow, which is the ally of England. In order to conquer London, as well as the Indies, which belong to London, I find it necessary to go to Moscow."

Well, there assembled then the greatest army that ever tramped in gaiters over the world; and the Emperor had them so curiously well lined up that he reviewed a million men in a single day.

"Hourra!" shout the Russians. And there they were—those animals of Cossacks who are forever running away, and the whole Russian nation, all complete! It was country against country—a general mix-up, where everybody had to look out for himself. As the Red Man had said to Napoleon, "It's Asia against Europe."

"All right!" replied the Emperor, "I'll take care." And then came fawning on Napoleon all the kings of Europe,—Austria, Prussia, Bavaria, Saxony, Poland, Italy,—all flattering us and going along with us. It was splendid! The French eagles never cooed as they did on parade then, when they were held high above all the flags of Europe. The Poles couldn't contain themselves for joy, because the Emperor intended to set them up again as a nation—and for that reason the French and the Poles have been like brothers ever since.

"Russia shall be ours!" cried the army.

We crossed the frontier,—the whole lot of us,—and marched, and marched, and marched. No Russians! At last we found the rascals, camping on the bank of the Moscow River. That's where I got my cross; and I take leave to say that it was the damndest of battles! Napoleon himself was worried, because the Red Man had appeared again and had said to him, "My son, you are going too fast; you will run short of men, and your friends will betray you." Thereupon the Emperor proposed peace; but before the treaty was signed he said to us, "Let's give those Russians a drubbing!"

"All right!" said the army.

"Forward!" shout the sergeants.

My clothes were going to pieces and my shoes were all worn out from tramping over the bad roads out there, but I said to myself, "Never mind; since this is the last of the rumpus, I'll make 'em give me a bellyful!"

We were drawn up near the edge of the great ravine—in the front seats! The signal was given, and seven hundred pieces of artillery began a conversation that was enough to bring the blood from your ears. Well, to do justice to one's enemies, I must admit that the Russians let themselves be killed like Frenchmen. They wouldn't give way, and we couldn't advance.

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“Forward!” shouted our officers. “Here comes the Emperor!” And there he was, passing at a gallop, and motioning to us that it was very important to capture the redoubt. He put new life into us, and on we ran. I was the first to reach the ravine. Ah! Mon Dieu! How the colonels are falling, and the lieutenants, and the soldiers! But never mind! There’ll be all the more shoes for those who haven’t any, and epaulets for the ambitious fellows who know how to read.

At last the cry of “Victory!” rang all along the line; but—would you believe it?—there were twenty-five thousand Frenchmen lying on the ground! A trifle, eh? Well, such a thing had never been seen before. It was a regular harvest field after the reaping; only instead of stalks of grain there were bodies of men. That sobered the rest of us. But the Emperor soon came along, and when we formed a circle around him, he praised us and cheered us up (he could be very amiable when he liked), and made us feel quite contented, even although we were as hungry as wolves. Then he distributed crosses of honor among us, saluted the dead, and said, “On to Moscow!”

“All right! To Moscow!” replied the army.

And then what did the Russians do but burn their city! It made a six-mile bonfire which blazed for two days. The buildings fell like slates, and there was a rain of melted iron and lead which was simply horrible! Indeed, that fire was the lightning from the dark cloud of our misfortunes. The Emperor said: “There’s enough of this. If we stay here, none of my soldiers will ever get out.” But we waited a little to cool off and to refresh our carcasses; because we were really played out. We carried away a golden cross that was on the Kremlin, and every soldier had a small fortune.

On our way back, winter came upon us, a month earlier than usual,—a thing that those stupid scientific men have never properly explained,—and the cold caught us. Then there was no more army; do you understand? No army, no generals, no sergeants even! After that it was a reign of misery and hunger—a reign where we were all equal. We thought of nothing except of seeing France again. Nobody stooped to pick up his gun, or his money, if he happened to drop them; and every one went straight on, arms at will, caring nothing for glory. The weather was so bad that Napoleon could no longer see his star—the sky was hidden. Poor man! It made him sick at heart to see his eagles flying away from victory. It was a crushing blow to him.

Well, then came the Beresina. And now, my friends, I may say to you, on my honor and by everything sacred, that never—no, never since man lived on earth—has there been such a mixed up hodgepodge of army, wagons, and artillery, in the midst of such snows, and under such a pitiless sky! It was so cold that if you touched the barrel of your gun you burned your hand.

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It was there that Gondrin—who is now present with us—behaved so well. He is the only one now living of the pontooners who went down into the water that day and built the bridge on which we crossed the river. The Russians still had some respect for the Grand Army, on account of its past victories; but it was Gondrin and the pontooners who saved us, and [pointing at Gondrin, who was looking at him with the fixed attention peculiar to the deaf] Gondrin is a finished soldier and a soldier of honor, who is worthy of your highest esteem.

I saw the Emperor that day, standing motionless near the bridge, and never feeling the cold at all. Was that natural, do you think? He was watching the destruction of his treasure, his friends, his old Egyptian soldiers. It was the end of everything. Women, wagons, cannon—all were being destroyed, demolished, ruined, wrecked! A few of the bravest guarded the eagles; because the eagles, you understand, stood for France, for you, for the civil and military honor that had to be kept unstained and that was not to be humbled by the cold.

We hardly ever got warm except near the Emperor. When he was in danger, we all ran to him—although we were so nearly frozen that we would not have held out a hand to our dearest friend. They say that he used to weep at night over his poor family of soldiers. Nobody but he and Frenchmen could ever have pulled out of there. We did pull out, but it was with loss—terrible loss. Our allies ate up all of our provisions, and then began the treachery which the Red Man had foretold.

The blatherskites in Paris, who had kept quiet since the formation of the Imperial Guard, thought that the Guard had finally perished. So they got up a conspiracy and hoodwinked the Prefect of Police into an attempt to overthrow the Emperor. He heard of this and it worried him. When he left us he said: “Good-by, boys. Guard the posts. I will come back to you.”

After he had gone, things went from bad to worse. The generals lost their heads; and the marshals quarreled with one another and did all sorts of foolish things, as was natural. Napoleon, who was good to everybody, had fed them on gold until they had become as fat as pigs, and they didn’t want to do any more marching. This led to trouble, because many of them remained idle in forts behind the army that was driving us back to France, and didn’t even try to relieve us by attacking the enemy in the rear.

The Emperor finally returned, bringing with him a lot of splendid recruits whom he had drilled into regular war-dogs, ready to set their teeth into anything. He brought also a bourgeois guard of honor, a fine troop, which melted away in battle like butter on a hot gridiron. In spite of the bold front that we put on, everything went against us; although the army performed feats of wonderful courage. Then came regular battles of mountains—nations against nations—at Dresden, Lutzen, and

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Bautzen. Don't you ever forget that time, because it was then that Frenchmen showed how wonderfully heroic they could be. A good grenadier, in those days, seldom lasted more than six months. We always won, of course; but there in our rear were the English, stirring up the nations to take sides against us. But we fought our way through this pack of nations at last. Wherever Napoleon showed himself, we rushed; and whenever, on land or sea, he said, "I wish to pass," we passed.

We finally got back to France; and many a poor foot-soldier was braced up by the air of his native country, notwithstanding the hard times we had. As for myself, in particular, I may say that it renewed my life.

It then became a question of defending the fatherland—our fair France—against all Europe. They didn't like our laying down the law to the Russians, and our driving them back across their borders, so that they couldn't devour us, as is the custom of the North. Those Northern peoples are very greedy for the South, or at least that's what I've heard many generals say. Then Napoleon saw arrayed against him his own father-in-law, his friends whom he had made kings, and all the scoundrels whom he had put on thrones. Finally, in pursuance of orders from high quarters, even Frenchmen, and allies in our own ranks, turned against us; as at the battle of Leipsic. Common soldiers wouldn't have been mean enough to do that! Men who called themselves princes broke their word three times a day.

Well, then came the invasion. Wherever Napoleon showed his lion face the enemy retreated; and he worked more miracles in defending France than he had shown in conquering Italy, the East, Spain, Europe, and Russia. He wanted to bury all the invaders in France, and thus teach them to respect the country; so he let them come close to Paris, in order to swallow 'em all at a gulp and rise to the height of his genius in a battle greater than all the others—a regular mother of battles! But those cowardly Parisians were so afraid for their wretched skins and their miserable shops that they opened the gates of the city. Then the good times ended and the "ragusades" began. They fooled the Empress and hung white flags out of the palace windows. Finally the very generals whom Napoleon had taken for his best friends deserted him and went over to the Bourbons—of whom nobody had ever before heard. Then he bade us goodbye at Fontainebleau. "Soldiers!"

I can hear him, even now. We were all crying like regular babies, and the eagles and flags were lowered as if at a funeral. And it was a funeral—the funeral of the Empire. His old soldiers, once so hale and spruce, were little more than skeletons. Standing on the portico of his palace, he said to us:

“Comrades! We have been beaten through treachery; but we shall all see one another again in heaven, the country of the brave. Protect my child, whom I intrust to you. Long live Napoleon II!”

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Like Jesus Christ before his last agony, he believed himself deserted by God and his star; and in order that no one should see him conquered, it was his intention to die; but, although he took poison enough to kill a whole regiment, it never hurt him at all—another proof, you see, that he was more than man: he found himself immortal. As he felt sure of his business after that, and knew that he was to be Emperor always, he went to a certain island for a while, to study the natures of those people in Paris, who did not fail, of course, to do stupid things without end.

While he was standing guard down there, the Chinese and those animals on the coast of Africa—Moors and others, who are not at all easy to get along with—were so sure that he was something more than man that they respected his tent, and said that to touch it would be to offend God. So he reigned over the whole world, although those other fellows had sent him out of France.

Well, then, after a while he embarked again in the very same nut-shell of a boat that he had left Egypt in, passed right under the bows of the English vessels, and set foot once more in France. France acknowledged him; the sacred cuckoo flew from spire to spire; and all the people cried, “Long live the Emperor!”

In this vicinity the enthusiasm for the Wonder of the Ages was most hearty. Dauphiny behaved well; and it pleased me particularly to know that our own people here wept for joy when they saw again his gray coat.

On the 1st of March Napoleon landed, with two hundred men, to conquer the kingdom of France and Navarre; and on the 20th of the same month that kingdom became the French Empire. On that day *the man* was in Paris. He had made a clean sweep—had reconquered his dear France, and had brought all his old soldiers together again by saying only three words: “Here I am.” ’Twas the greatest miracle God had ever worked. Did ever a man, before him, take an empire by merely showing his hat? They thought that France was crushed, did they? Not a bit of it! At sight of the Eagle a national army sprang up, and we all marched to Waterloo. There the Guard perished, as if stricken down at a single blow. Napoleon, in despair, threw himself three times, at the head of his troops, on the enemy’s cannon, without being able to find death. The battle was lost.

That evening the Emperor called his old soldiers together, and, on the field wet with our blood, burned his eagles and his flags. The poor eagles, who had always been victorious, who had cried “Forward!” in all our battles, and who had flown over all Europe, were saved from the disgrace of falling into the hands of their enemies. All the treasure of England couldn’t buy the tail of one of them. They were no more!

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The rest of the story is well known to everybody. The Red Man went over to the Bourbons, like the scoundrel that he is; France was crushed; and the old soldiers, who were no longer of any account, were deprived of their dues and sent back to their homes, in order that their places might be given to a lot of nobles who couldn't even march—it was pitiful to see them try! Then Napoleon was seized, through treachery, and the English nailed him to a rock, ten thousand feet above the earth, on a desert island in the great ocean. There he must stay until the Red Man, for the good of France, gives him back his power. It is said by some that he is dead. Oh, yes! Dead! That shows how little they know him! They only tell that lie to cheat the people and keep peace in their shanty of a government. The truth of the matter is that his friends have left him there in the desert to fulfil a prophecy that was made about him—for I have forgotten to tell you that the name Napoleon really means “Lion of the Desert.”

This that I have told you is gospel truth; and all the other things that you hear about the Emperor are foolish stories with no human likeliness. Because, you see, God never gave to any other man born of woman the power to write his name in red across the whole world—and the world will remember him forever. Long live Napoleon, the father of the soldiers and the people!