

"THE HUNDRED DAYS"

From January, 1814, the beginning of the campaign of France, until the victorious allies entered Paris on the 31st of March of the same year, the French Empire seemed destined to fall. Neither the genius of Napoleon, the rapidity of his marches, nor the valor of his officers and men could repel the terrific onslaught of the advancing armies of Russia, Prussia and Austria. So, with hope gone, and knowing that even the French senate disfavoured the Emperor, the leaders of the Imperial Army decreed that it were best that Napoleon should abdicate. The Emperor himself, still with the old fire of ambition unquenched, thought differently, but knew that now the safer course lay in giving up his power. The terms of abdication, however, which he proposed were rejected; the allies declared that he must forsake all his imperial and kingly rights, and forever leave France. They conceded to him a pension of two million francs and the absolute sovereignty of the little isle of Elba in the Mediterranean. Moreover, in the hope of suppressing Republican sentiment, a treaty was signed at Paris, May 30th, 1814, by which the Empire of Napoleon was stripped of every vestige of power that it had gained during the twenty years it had been fighting against the armies of Europe.

With Napoleon banished, the Bourbon Louis, for twenty-three years an exile from the continent, was called back to France and proclaimed King at Bordeaux, under the title of Louis XVIII. Thus, the house of Bourbon was again restored, and a new representative of ancient absolutism undertook the government of France. Louis, influenced by the reactionary tendencies of his ministers, tried to introduce into the country the selfsame policy which had caused the uprising of 1789, but the old power of the Bourbons was gone, for the ideals of post-revolutionary days could not be suppressed.

While the humiliating treatment by the allies and the manifest weakness of the King enraged and disgusted the people of France and made them long for the return of their idol, Napoleon, resting at Elba, keenly watched the course of events at home.

He clearly foresaw that Bourbon supremacy would be short-lived, and that soon the old republican spirit would re-assert itself. After the close of the assembly at Paris in June, 1814, the commissioners provided for a general congress to be held at Vienna in October of the same year, at which the sovereigns and ambassadors of the various nations would sit to discuss the destinies of their realms. The task was a great one, and before its completion, the winter was almost over. Napoleon, ever ready to grasp a favourable opportunity, saw that his time was at hand, and, on the 26th of February, 1815, he quietly sailed from Elba and landed in the little seaport town of Cannes in southern France.

Great was the sensation throughout the country. The old soldiers of the Republic and Empire flocked about him. As he marched toward Paris, officers and soldiers joined him in ever-increasing numbers; at Lyons, Marshall Monsieur and the Duke of Orleans, who with an army had been sent out to check his progress, at the sight of their old leader, forsook their purpose and went over to his standard. Marshall Ney, who in his impetuosity had accepted the Restoration, and who had promised to put Napoleon in an iron cage and bring him a prisoner to Paris, met the Emperor at Auxerre and followed him.

On the 19th of March, Napoleon and his troops reached the town of Fontainebleau on the Seine, and the next morning triumphantly re-entered the capital. Here, everything was in confusion; the government of Louis was gone, and the King and his household had fled to Belgium and England. The Emperor saw that, if he intended to re-establish his Empire, he must first make the

rest of Europe feel the power of France. To do this, he must gain the confidence of the people, so he immediately framed "An act additional to the constitutions of the Empire," in which concessions were granted pleasing even to the extreme republicans. He next tried to come to terms with the allies, but in this he was unsuccessful; they had previously sworn that they would never bargain with a Bonaparte. Napoleon chose the only alternative—war

He, accordingly, issued his last great call to arms in May, 1815; both age and youth responded, and although the country on account of the long years of war and privation had been almost exhausted, an army of three hundred and sixty-seven thousand men was equipped and armed before the 10th of June. Because of the allied advance, the time was too short to prepare for the defence Napoleon had anticipated, and before he had made final preparation, he was forced to strike.

From the position of the various armies, it was evident to the French that the decisive struggle would take place in Belgium. Here Wellington, at the head of the allied forces, waited to be joined by the powerful Prussian divisions under Blucher. With the object of meeting the armies separately, Napoleon crossed into Belgium on the 15th of June, and the next day defeated Blucher at Ligny. At the same time, Marshall Ney attacked the British at Quatre Bras, but was repulsed, being forced to retreat to Waterloo, a small town near the forest of Soignes, about eight miles southeast of Brussels. Napoleon now concentrated all his efforts to prevent the junction of the two armies under Wellington and Blucher.

Accordingly, a division of thirty-four thousand men under Marshall Grouchy was despatched to follow up Blucher and keep him occupied, with strict orders to hasten back to Waterloo should it fail to hold the Prussians. Feeling confident that Grouchy would succeed, he advanced to join Ney at Waterloo, arriving there on the evening of the

17th, too late to begin the battle. On the morrow, when the two armies, each numbering about eighty thousand faced each other, it was apparent that the English had the more advantageous position. Their forces, combined with those of the Netherlands, occupied a circle of hills in front of the town, the lines extending a mile and a half in length. The French were formed in three lines parallel to the road from Brussels to Charleroi; half way between the British and French centres, lay the stone Chateau of Hougomont, held by the English; while to the left, were the hamlets of Mont Saint Jean and La Haie Sainte, also in British hands.

About half-past eleven on the morning of the 18th, the French opened the attack, taking the wood in front of Hougomont, but failing to capture the Chateau. At noon, a Prussian detachment under Bulow attacked the French right flank, and Napoleon was forced to weaken his centre in order to repel the onslaught. For this reason, he quickly changed his plans and determined to break the British centre. Ordering Ney to move against the Hamlet of La Haie Sainte, he made another attack on the Chateau; after terrible fighting the Hamlet finally fell, but the defenders of the Chateau remained firm and the assault was repulsed with heavy losses to both sides. While Napoleon watched the manoeuvres of Bulow on the right, Wellington had failed in a fitful attempt to recapture La Haie Sainte. Thinking that now the time was opportune to attack the British centre and break the line, Ney sent to Bonaparte for re-enforcements. Napoleon had already weakened his reserves to such an extent that he could not spare the required numbers, so he sent to Ney a detachment barely sufficient to hold his position. Through some misunderstanding, the Marshall thought that he was supposed to make the assault with the forces at his command, and ordered the charge.

“It is an hour too soon,” said Napoleon, when he

perceived what had been done. He, nevertheless, aided Ney with all the possible infantry and cavalry he could spare, and succeeded in driving the English squares back a short distance, where they stood fast. Durutte had been successful in another part of the field, having defeated the allies at Papelotte, and Marshall Loban routed the Prussians under Bulow from the village of Planchenois. Thus at five o'clock, it seemed as though the French would be victorious. The fighting continued with little progress on either side, although the British lines were badly shattered by the shelling of the French howitzers. Wellington yearned for the arrival of Blucher with his forty thousand Prussians. Was he defeated, or had he been held back by Grouchy? The fate of the two armies hung in the balance—if Blucher arrived first in the field, the British would carry the day, if Grouchy, the French. Toward six o'clock the French heard to their right a distant sound of bugles, and thought that it was Grouchy returning. Instead, Grouchy's division, having missed the retreating Prussians at the outset, had gone on for miles in another direction, and Blucher, finding that he was not followed, hastened back to Waterloo.

When Napoleon beheld the ensigns of Prussia in the van of the approaching army, he realized that now or never he must break the British centre, and that on his success depended the fate of Imperial France. He quickly called out the four remaining battalions of his veterans, and sent them against the English lines, ordering the "Old Guard" to make ready for a charge. More than a hundred times had this famous guard hurled itself against the enemy and had never failed in its objective. Would it do the same now? It must. At sunset, the order was given, and the flower of the French cavalry rode to its doom. They broke like an avalanche upon the British centre, came back, reformed, and charged again, but to no avail. From those who witnessed this last desperate

struggle of the "Old Guard" arose the cry, "La garde reculee, la garde reculee."

It was so; the hope of France was gone; the hitherto invincible horsemen had been repulsed and cut to pieces. Vainly did Napoleon strive to rally his despairing soldiers; he formed a single regiment of the guard into a square, and, placing himself in their midst, marshalled his scattered ranks for a last grand resistance, declaring that he would remain with his men to the end. Defiantly these stood and, as the Prussians bore down upon them, made one final charge, dying almost to a man.

With the defeat of the "Old Guard," ended the famous "Hundred Days" of Napoleon and the career of one of the greatest figures "that in the annals of the world rose, reigned, or fell." After Waterloo, he strove to gain some recognition for his son, the young "King of Rome," but he was unsuccessful. Upon mature deliberation, the allies agreed that he be banished to the island of St. Helena. Here, he passed the remainder of his days, writing his "Memoirs" and brooding over the glory and the tragedy of his past.

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