

### **Chapter III - The Enigma of Waterloo**

That great Englishman Charles Fox, who was as national as Nelson, went to his death with the firm conviction that England had made Napoleon. He did not mean, of course, that any other Italian gunner would have done just as well; but he did mean that by forcing the French back on their guns, as it were, we had made their chief gunner necessarily their chief citizen. Had the French Republic been left alone, it would probably have followed the example of most other ideal experiments; and praised peace along with progress and equality. It would almost certainly have eyed with the coldest suspicion any adventurer who appeared likely to substitute his personality for the pure impersonality of the Sovereign People; and would have considered it the very flower of republican chastity to provide a Brutus for such a Caesar. But if it was undesirable that equality should be threatened by a citizen, it was intolerable that it should be simply forbidden by a foreigner. If France could not put up with French soldiers she would very soon have to put up with Austrian soldiers; and it would be absurd if, having decided to rely on soldiering, she had hampered the best French soldier even on the ground that he was not French. So that whether we regard Napoleon as a hero rushing to the country's help, or a tyrant profiting by the country's extremity, it is equally clear that those who made the war made the war-lord; and those who tried to destroy the Republic were those who created the Empire. So, at least, Fox argued against that much less English prig who would have called him unpatriotic; and he threw the blame upon Pitt's Government for having joined the anti-French alliance, and so tipped up the scale in favour of a military France. But whether he was right or no, he would have been the readiest to admit that England was not the first to fly at the throat of the young Republic. Something in Europe much vaster and vaguer had from the first stirred against it. What was it then that first made war--and made Napoleon? There is only one possible answer: the Germans. This is the second act of our drama of the degradation of England to the level of Germany. And it has this very important development; that Germany means by this time all the Germans, just as it does to-day. The savagery of Prussia and the stupidity of Austria are now combined. Mercilessness and muddleheadedness are met together; unrighteousness and unreasonableness have kissed each other; and the tempter and the tempted are agreed. The great and good Maria Theresa was already old. She had a son who was a philosopher of the school of Frederick; also a daughter who was more fortunate, for she was guillotined. It was natural, no doubt, that her brother and relatives should disapprove of the incident; but it occurred long after the whole Germanic power had been hurled against the new Republic. Louis XVI. himself was still alive and nominally ruling when the first pressure came from Prussia and Austria, demanding that the trend of the French emancipation should be reversed. It is

impossible to deny, therefore, that what the united Germanics were resolved to destroy was the reform and not even the Revolution. The part which Joseph of Austria played in the matter is symbolic. For he was what is called an enlightened despot, which is the worst kind of despot. He was as irreligious as Frederick the Great, but not so disgusting or amusing. The old and kindly Austrian family, of which Maria Theresa was the affectionate mother, and Marie Antoinette the rather uneducated daughter, was already superseded and summed up by a rather dried-up young man self-schooled to a Prussian efficiency. The needle is already veering northward. Prussia is already beginning to be the captain of the Germanics "in shining armour." Austria is already becoming a loyal sekundant.

But there still remains one great difference between Austria and Prussia which developed more and more as the energy of the young Napoleon was driven like a wedge between them. The difference can be most shortly stated by saying that Austria did, in some blundering and barbaric way, care for Europe; but Prussia cared for nothing but Prussia. Austria is not a nation; you cannot really find Austria on the map. But Austria is a kind of Empire; a Holy Roman Empire that never came, an expanding and contracting-dream. It does feel itself, in a vague patriarchal way, the leader, not of a nation, but of nations. It is like some dying Emperor of Rome in the decline; who should admit that the legions had been withdrawn from Britain or from Parthia, but would feel it as fundamentally natural that they should have been there, as in Sicily or Southern Gaul. I would not assert that the aged Francis Joseph imagines that he is Emperor of Scotland or of Denmark; but I should guess that he retains some notion that if he did rule both the Scots and the Danes, it would not be more incongruous than his ruling both the Hungarians and the Poles. This cosmopolitanism of Austria has in it a kind of shadow of responsibility for Christendom. And it was this that made the difference between its proceedings and those of the purely selfish adventurer from the north, the wild dog of Pomerania.

It may be believed, as Fox himself came at last to believe, that Napoleon in his latest years was really an enemy to freedom, in the sense that he was an enemy to that very special and occidental form of freedom which we call Nationalism. The resistance of the Spaniards, for instance, was certainly a popular resistance. It had that peculiar, belated, almost secretive strength with which war is made by the people. It was quite easy for a conqueror to get into Spain; his great difficulty was to get out again. It was one of the paradoxes of history that he who had turned the mob into an army, in defence of its rights against the princes, should at last have his army worn down, not by princes but by mobs. It is equally certain that at the other end of Europe, in burning Moscow and on the bridge of the Beresina, he had found the common soul, even as he had found the common sky, his enemy. But all this does not affect the first great lines of the quarrel, which had begun before horsemen in Germanic uniform had waited vainly upon the

road to Varennes or had failed upon the miry slope up to the windmill of Valmy. And that duel, on which depended all that our Europe has since become, had great Russia and gallant Spain and our own glorious island only as subordinates or seconds. That duel, first, last, and for ever, was a duel between the Frenchman and the German; that is, between the citizen and the barbarian.

It is not necessary nowadays to defend the French Revolution, it is not necessary to defend even Napoleon, its child and champion, from criticisms in the style of Southey and Alison, which even at the time had more of the atmosphere of Bath and Cheltenham than of Turcoing and Talavera. The French Revolution was attacked because it was democratic and defended because it was democratic; and Napoleon was not feared as the last of the iron despots, but as the first of the iron democrats. What France set out to prove France has proved; not that common men are all angels, or all diplomatists, or all gentlemen (for these inane aristocratic illusions were no part of the Jacobin theory), but that common men can all be citizens and can all be soldiers; that common men can fight and can rule. There is no need to confuse the question with any of those escapades of a floundering modernism which have made nonsense of this civic common-sense. Some Free Traders have seemed to leave a man no country to fight for; some Free Lovers seem to leave a man no household to rule. But these things have not established themselves either in France or anywhere else. What has been established is not Free Trade or Free Love, but Freedom; and it is nowhere so patriotic or so domestic as in the country from which it came. The poor men of France have not loved the land less because they have shared it. Even the patricians are patriots; and if some honest Royalists or aristocrats are still saying that democracy cannot organise and cannot obey, they are none the less organised by it and obeying it, nobly living or splendidly dead for it, along the line from Switzerland to the sea.

But for Austria, and even more for Russia, there was this to be said; that the French Republican ideal was incomplete, and that they possessed, in a corrupt but still positive and often popular sense, what was needed to complete it. The Czar was not democratic, but he was humanitarian. He was a Christian Pacifist; there is something of the Tolstoyan in every Russian. It is not wholly fanciful to talk of the White Czar: for Russia even destruction has a deathly softness as of snow. Her ideas are often innocent and even childish; like the idea of Peace. The phrase Holy Alliance was a beautiful truth for the Czar, though only a blasphemous jest for his rascally allies, Metternich and Castlereagh. Austria, though she had lately fallen to a somewhat treasonable toying with heathens and heretics of Turkey and Prussia, still retained something of the old Catholic comfort for the soul. Priests still bore witness to that mighty mediaeval institution which even its enemies concede to be a noble nightmare. All their hoary political iniquities had not deprived them of that dignity. If they darkened the sun in

heaven, they clothed it with the strong colours of sunrise in garment or gloriole; if they had given men stones for bread, the stones were carved with kindly faces and fascinating tales. If justice counted on their shameful gibbets hundreds of the innocent dead, they could still say that for them death was more hopeful than life for the heathen. If the new daylight discovered their vile tortures, there had lingered in the darkness some dim memory that they were tortures of Purgatory and not, like those which Parisian and Prussian diabolists showed shameless in the sunshine, of naked hell. They claimed a truth not yet disentangled from human nature; for indeed earth is not even earth without heaven, as a landscape is not a landscape without the sky. And in, a universe without God there is not room enough for a man.

It may be held, therefore, that there must in any case have come a conflict between the old world and the new; if only because the old are often broad, while the young are always narrow. The Church had learnt, not at the end but at the beginning of her centuries, that the funeral of God is always a premature burial. If the bugles of Bonaparte raised the living populace of the passing hour, she could blow that yet more revolutionary trumpet that shall raise all the democracy of the dead. But if we concede that collision was inevitable between the new Republic on the one hand and Holy Russia and the Holy Roman Empire on the other, there remain two great European forces which, in different attitudes and from very different motives, determined the ultimate combination. Neither of them had any tincture of Catholic mysticism. Neither of them had any tincture of Jacobin idealism. Neither of them, therefore, had any real moral reason for being in the war at all. The first was England, and the second was Prussia.

It is very arguable that England must, in any case, have fought to keep her influence on the ports of the North Sea. It is quite equally arguable that if she had been as heartily on the side of the French Revolution as she was at last against it, she could have claimed the same concessions from the other side. It is certain that England had no necessary communion with the arms and tortures of the Continental tyrannies, and that she stood at the parting of the ways. England was indeed an aristocracy, but a liberal one; and the ideas growing in the middle classes were those which had already made America, and were remaking France. The fiercest Jacobins, such as Danton, were deep in the liberal literature of England. The people had no religion to fight for, as in Russia or La Vendée. The parson was no longer a priest, and had long been a small squire. Already that one great blank in our land had made snobbishness the only religion of South England; and turned rich men into a mythology. The effect can be well summed up in that decorous abbreviation by which our rustics speak of "Lady's Bedstraw," where they once spoke of "Our Lady's Bedstraw." We have dropped the comparatively democratic adjective, and kept the aristocratic noun. South England is still, as it was called in the Middle Ages, a garden; but it is the kind

where grow the plants called "lords and ladies."

We became more and more insular even about our continental conquests; we stood upon our island as if on an anchored ship. We never thought of Nelson at Naples, but only eternally at Trafalgar; and even that Spanish name we managed to pronounce wrong. But even if we regard the first attack upon Napoleon as a national necessity, the general trend remains true. It only changes the tale from a tragedy of choice to a tragedy of chance. And the tragedy was that, for a second time, we were at one with the Germans.

But if England had nothing to fight for but a compromise, Prussia had nothing to fight for but a negation. She was and is, in the supreme sense, the spirit that denies. It is as certain that she was fighting against liberty in Napoleon as it is that she was fighting against religion in Maria Theresa. What she was fighting for she would have found it quite impossible to tell you. At the best, it was for Prussia; if it was anything else, it was tyranny. She cringed to Napoleon when he beat her, and only joined in the chase when braver people had beaten him. She professed to restore the Bourbons, and tried to rob them while she was restoring them. For her own hand she would have wrecked the Restoration with the Revolution. Alone in all that agony of peoples, she had not the star of one solitary ideal to light the night of her nihilism.

The French Revolution has a quality which all men feel; and which may be called a sudden antiquity. Its classicalism was not altogether a cant. When it had happened it seemed to have happened thousands of years ago. It spoke in parables; in the hammering of spears and the awful cap of Phrygia. To some it seemed to pass like a vision; and yet it seemed eternal as a group of statuary. One almost thought of its most strenuous figures as naked. It is always with a shock of comicality that we remember that its date was so recent that umbrellas were fashionable and top-hats beginning to be tried. And it is a curious fact, giving a kind of completeness to this sense of the thing as something that happened outside the world, that its first great act of arms and also its last were both primarily symbols; and but for this visionary character, were in a manner vain. It began with the taking of the old and almost empty prison called the Bastille; and we always think of it as the beginning of the Revolution, though the real Revolution did not come till some time after. And it ended when Wellington and Blucher met in 1815; and we always think of it as the end of Napoleon; though Napoleon had really fallen before. And the popular imagery is right, as it generally is in such things: for the mob is an artist, though not a man of science. The riot of the 14th of July did not specially deliver prisoners inside the Bastille, but it did deliver the prisoners outside. Napoleon when he returned was indeed a revenant, that is, a ghost. But Waterloo was all the more final in that it was a spectral resurrection and a second death. And in this second case there were

other elements that were yet more strangely symbolic. That doubtful and double battle before Waterloo was like the dual personality in a dream. It corresponded curiously to the double mind of the Englishman. We connect Quatre Bras with things romantically English to the verge of sentimentalism, with Byron and "The Black Brunswicker." We naturally sympathise with Wellington against Ney. We do not sympathise, and even then we did not really sympathise, with Blucher against Napoleon. Germany has complained that we passed over lightly the presence of Prussians at the decisive action. And well we might. Even at the time our sentiment was not solely jealousy, but very largely shame. Wellington, the grimmest and even the most unamiable of Tories, with no French sympathies and not enough human ones, has recorded his opinion of his Prussian allies in terms of curt disgust. Peel, the primmest and most snobbish Tory that ever praised "our gallant Allies" in a frigid official speech, could not contain himself about the conduct of Blucher's men. Our middle classes did well to adorn their parlours with the picture of the "Meeting of Wellington and Blucher." They should have hung up a companion piece of Pilate and Herod shaking hands. Then, after that meeting amid the ashes of Hougomont, where they dreamed they had trodden out the embers of all democracy, the Prussians rode on before, doing after their kind. After them went that ironical aristocrat out of embittered Ireland, with what thoughts we know; and Blucher, with what thoughts we care not; and his soldiers entered Paris, and stole the sword of Joan of Arc.