THE SUNDAY TIMES BESTSELLER

1812

NAPOLEON'S FATAL MARCH ON MOSCOW

ADAM ZAMOYSKI

'So brilliant that it is impossible to put the book aside …
A master craftsman at work' MICHAEL BURLEIGH, *Sunday Times*

Adam Zamoyski

1812: Napoleon's Fatal March on Moscow

«HarperCollins»

Zamoyski A.

1812: Napoleon's Fatal March on Moscow / A. Zamoyski — «HarperCollins»,

The Sunday Times bestselling account of Napoleon's invasion of Russia and eventual retreat from Moscow, events that had a profound effect on the subsequent course of Russian and European history.The saga of Napoleon's invasion of Russia and catastrophic retreat from Moscow has both fascinated military historians and captured the imagination of millions on an emotional and human level. 1812 tells the story of how the most powerful man on earth met his doom, and how the greatest fighting force ever assembled was wiped out. Over 400,000 French and Allied troops died on the disastrous Russian campaign, with the vast majority of the casualties occuring during the frigid winter retreat. Adam Zamoyski tells their story with incredible detail and sympathy, drawing on a wealth of first-hand accounts of the tragedy to create a vivid portrait of an unimaginable catastrophe.By 1810 Napoleon was master of Europe, defied only by Britain and its naval power. His intention was to destroy Britain through a total blockade, the Continental System. But Tsar Alexander of Russia refused to apply the blockade, and Napoleon decided to bring him to heel.The brutality of the following military campaign and the importance of its ramifications on Russian, French, German and, indeed, European history and culture cannot be understated. Adam Zamoyski's epic, enthralling narrative is the definitive account of the events of that dramatic year.

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Introductory Note

Napoleon's invasion of Russia in 1812 was one of the most dramatic episodes in European history, an event of epic proportions, etched deeply in the popular imagination. I only had to mention the subject of this book for people to come to life, stirred by recollections of Tolstoy's *War and Peace*, by the scale of the tragedy, by some anecdote that had lodged itself in their memory, or just a mental image of snowbound Napoleonic tragedy. But the flash of recognition was almost invariably followed by an admission of total ignorance of what had actually happened and why. The reasons for this curious discrepancy are fascinating in themselves.

No other campaign in history has been subjected to such overtly political uses. From the very beginning, studies of the subject have been driven by a compulsion to interpret and justify that admits of no objectivity, while their sheer volume – over five thousand books and twice as many articles published in Russia alone in the hundred years after 1812 – has helped only to cloud the issue.[1]

This was to be expected, considering what was involved. There were great reputations at stake: those of Napoleon, of Tsar Alexander, of Field Marshal Kutuzov, to name only the obvious ones. There was also a need to make sense of the whole business, for this war, unprecedented in the history of Europe in both scale and horror, was not easy to assess in military terms. The action was often confused. Both sides claimed victory in every engagement. And if the French had lost the campaign, the Russians could hardly be said to have won it. At the same time, people on both sides had behaved with a savagery that neither nation wished to contemplate.

In France, early attempts at a balanced study were complicated by political factors: the regime which replaced Napoleon's soon after the events required anything to do with him to be represented in the most negative terms. Censorship also played a part in Russian assessments, for more complex reasons. The events of 1812 and their aftermath raised questions about the very nature of the Russian state and its people, and, as the historian Orlando Figes nicely puts it, 'the nine-teenth-century quest for Russian nationhood began in the ranks of 1812'.[2]

This quest was innately subversive of the Tsarist system, and led in the first place to the Decembrist Rising of 1825. It was pursued, along divergent paths, by those who sought a more modern Russia integrated into the mainstream of Western civilisation, and by the slavophiles, who rejected the West and all it stood for, seeking instead a truly 'Russian' way. The events of 1812 were used by both sides to back up their arguments, rapidly attaining mythological status and becoming increasingly distorted as a result. This dualism was only complicated with the advent of Marxism.

The first French historians to write about 1812 were either hostile to Napoleon or motivated by a desire to ingratiate themselves with the post-Napoleonic regime, and therefore laid all blame at the feet of the demon Bonaparte. But most French writers on the events of the campaign, whether they were participants or later academic historians, have followed a more measured, and broadly similar, path. While often displaying a degree of embarrassment over such an apparently imperialist venture and the misery France inflicted on the Russian people, not to mention her own and her allies' soldiers, they have tried to redeem Napoleon's reputation and the honour of French arms by a generous representation of the doughtiness of the Russian soldier and of the implacable nature of the Russian climate. They have also clutched at the straw of comfort held out by the Romantic imagination of the 1820s and 1830s, which turned the picture of sordid disaster into a vision of greatness in adversity.

In the last decades of the nineteenth century, distance as well as a growing cordiality between the two nations made it possible for French historians to approach the subject more objectively. The centenary, coming as it did just before the Great War and at a time when the two nations were allies, saw cooperation between the historical commissions of the French and Russian staffs, and led to

the publication of much primary source-material. But French historians continue to show a certain reluctance to deal with the war, and have come up with no satisfactory general study of it.

The first Russian account of the events, by a colonel on the general staff, was produced with such alacrity that it was published, in English, as far afield as Boston within a year. It was undoubtedly a piece of propaganda, intended to pave the way for Russia's future role in the affairs of Europe, but it did reflect the perceptions of large sections of Russian society. It depicted Alexander as the catalyst who rallied a gallant patriotic nobility and a loyal peasantry eager to defend Faith, Tsar and Fatherland.

Dmitri Petrovich Buturlin, himself a participant, who wrote the first detailed account of the war, added a couple of new elements. One was the idea of Russia as the innocent victim of aggression. The other was the image of Kutuzov as the quintessential Russian hero, simple but wise. A.I. Mikhailovsky-Danilevsky, whose four-volume history came out in 1839, depicted Alexander as a moral beacon awakening the spiritual as well as the physical forces of the Russian people in defence of their fatherland. It was he who first called it the '*Otechestvennaia Voina*', the 'Patriotic War'. Underlying much of their writing was the view that it was the Almighty, acting through the Tsar and the Russian people, who had confounded the evil one. This being so, French assertions that they had been defeated by the Russian winter rather than the Russians themselves were dismissed as irrelevant.

It was against the backdrop of this fundamentally spiritual interpretation that in the summer of 1863 Tolstoy began work on his novel *War and Peace*, in which he was to add his own highly personal gloss on the events.

Tolstoy had originally been enthusiastic about the programme of liberal reforms launched by Tsar Alexander II when he came to the throne in 1855. He had even tried to pre-empt them by offering the serfs on his estate a deal that would free them from their obligations and give them the land they worked. But the serfs were suspicious and rejected his offer. Instead of turning Tolstoy against the peasants, this helped to put him off liberalism in general. He embraced the slavophile view that the liberals would destroy Russia by imposing foreign ideas and institutions alien to the Russian character. He also reacted against the wave of self-abasement among intellectuals who had turned the recent defeat in the Crimean War into a paradigm for Russian backwardness. In his depiction of the events of 1812, Tolstoy traces a metaphor of the penetration of Russia by foreign influences: Napoleon is the harbinger of an 'alien' order, which some of Alexander's 'contaminated' entourage favour. But it is rejected by the Russian nation. Yet this is no glorification of the Russian common people – the hero of Tolstoy's novel is a deferential peasantry led by the minor nobility who, unlike the Frenchified aristocrats, have remained true to Russian values. But Tolstoy's work is not all fantasy, and he did his homework.

The first sentence of *War and Peace* expresses outrage at French doings in Genoa and Lucca in 1799, while on the next page one of the protagonists affirms that Russia will be 'the saviour of Europe'. With this opening, Tolstoy firmly dismissed the notion of the French invasion of 1812 as an act of gratuitous aggression: to him it was clear that it was merely part of a prolonged struggle between France and Russia for hegemony over Europe. Yet it was to be some time before a Russian historian would mention this.

The second half of the nineteenth century saw the publication of a great many diaries, recollections and letters of participants in the events; of staff documents giving troop numbers and dispositions; and of official documents, orders and letters. It also brought forth a number of very useful studies of specific aspects of the campaign, of individual battles, and of social reactions to the events.

The next generation of Russian historians to deal with the subject in any depth were influenced by the works of Marx and Engels and took a more pragmatic view. It is true that Aleksandr Nikolaevich Popov, writing in 1912, idealised Kutuzov and 'Russian society', but his more down-to-earth contemporary Vladimir Ivanovich Kharkievich admitted that Kutuzov had faults, and rejected

the image of Russia as innocent victim. Konstantin Adamovich Voensky took a similar line, and related Russian military failures in 1812 to the shortcomings of the country's constitution and social structure. A number of other historians produced studies of specific aspects, in which they turned up evidence of a less glorious response by Russian society than had been represented hitherto, and confirmed that logistics and climate had been largely responsible for the outcome.

Perhaps the most forceful of this generation of historians, and the one who reacted most vigorously against the old pieties, was Mikhail Nikolaevich Pokrovsky. According to him, the Tsarist state was bent on extending Russian hegemony beyond its borders in order to guarantee the survival of an essentially feudal system at home. He went so far as to say that Napoleon's invasion of Russia was 'an act of necessary self-defence' on his part. He was deeply critical of Kutuzov and other Russian generals. He stressed the role of the weather in the defeat of the French, and belittled the role of 'Russian society', questioning the myth of the patriotic peasants. Those who did resist the invader did so, according to him, in defence of their chickens and geese, not their fatherland.[3]

This view was endorsed by Lenin, and held sway during the first two decades of Soviet rule. The war was not referred to as the 'Patriotic War' during this period, as it concerned only the respective economic interests of the Russian imperialists and the French bourgeoisie. The Russian army had made a mess of defending the country precisely because it was commanded by nobles, and the government's fear of arming the peasants prevented the development of a guerrilla war against the French.

At Stalin's prompting, a ruling of the Central Committee on 16 May 1934 recommended a fresh approach to the study of history, aimed at engaging the masses. How that would affect the representation of the events of 1812 was not immediately clear. Writing in 1936, the historian Evgenii Viktorovich Tarle affirmed that the Russian people had played no part in the war, dismissing evidence of peasant guerrilla activity as no more than the opportunistic murder of French stragglers. The following year he published an account of the war in which he said almost exactly the opposite, representing it as the triumph of the patriotic Russian people. After a certain amount of hair-splitting argument couched in the language of Marxist dialectics, it was once again dubbed the 'Patriotic War', but only in inverted commas. Tarle also admitted that the weather might have had something to do with the French débâcle, but was later accused of retailing the ideas of what one writer termed 'the Trotskyite-Bukharinite counter-revolutionary enemies of the people' and 'the lying inventions of foreign authors' – even the account by the great military theorist Karl von Clausewitz, himself a participant in the campaign on the Russian side, was dismissed as 'lies'.

Tarle adopted a traditional spiritual view of the events, representing the French victory at Borodino as 'a moral victory' for the Russians and the war itself as the crucible of all that was best in Russian history over the next decades. He also built up the image of Kutuzov, as a kind of metaphysical emanation of the Russian people, their true leader in every sense.[4] But it was his colleague P.A. Zhilin who made the obvious connection between Kutuzov and Stalin as saviours of the fatherland.

Hitler's invasion of Russia in 1941 and the titanic struggle that followed added substance to this connection, and the events of 1812 provided a wonderful source of propaganda material. The 'Patriotic War of 1812', as it would henceforth be known, could be viewed as a dress rehearsal for what became the 'Great Patriotic War'. Tarle's book was translated and published widely in the West, in order to help make the point that a peace-loving Russia had been attacked for no reason at all – deftly burying the embarrassing fact that, just as in 1812, Russia had been a complicitous ally of the other side up to the very outbreak of hostilities – but that her people and the great leaders that sprung from their bosom were invincible.

For a brief period following Stalin's death in 1953 an element of objectivity entered Russian historiography, and a number of solid studies on the economic, political and diplomatic background, the military preparations and other aspects saw the light of day. But the advent of Brezhnev put the

lid on this. Historians such as L.G. Beskrovny plugged the old patriotic nostrums and shamelessly repeated obvious falsehoods. French numbers were regularly inflated and those of the Russian forces scaled down. The persona of Kutuzov took on a life of its own. The luxury-loving prince was transformed into a kind of peasant leader who was in some mysterious way 'in conflict' with the Tsar and the system. Every blunder he made was represented as a piece of cunning, the actual effect of which was not defined, and every failure to act as a brilliant strategic ploy.

This kind of interpretation went unchallenged until the late 1980s, when a new generation of historians, such as A.A. Abalikhin, V.G. Sirotkin, S.V. Shvedov, Oleg Sokolov and N.A. Troitsky brought a freshness and honesty to the subject never known before. But it will probably be some time before a satisfying synthesis emerges from this.

The handful of Western historians who have written on the subject have made modest use of available Russian primary sources, relying instead on the works of their Russian colleagues. Not surprisingly, they have accepted the facts and figures they found in these. More surprisingly, most have also accepted some of the interpretations and ingested, albeit unconsciously, a dose of their emotional and political flavour.

Virtually all the extant documentary material concerning the political and military events covered by this book has been published and available for decades. It would be interesting, and possibly worthwhile, to investigate further areas such as the question of how the episode impacted on the structures of the Russian state, its economy and attitudes to authority. It might also be profitable to go back to the manuscript originals of some of the printed sources, particularly where these have been translated from French into Russian. But it is highly improbable that new documents of any significance will come to light, or that further detailed research in any ancillary field will throw up fresh evidence on the causes of the war, its conduct, the numbers involved, the extent of the losses or any of the other vital aspects.

The ground has therefore been thoroughly prepared, and now that the nationalist passions and the political imperatives have ebbed away, the task of writing about the events of 1812 should present a less daunting prospect. But it remains a formidable one. For this was not just any war. It was the climax in a protracted struggle between Napoleon and Alexander, between France and Russia, and between the ideological inheritance of the European Enlightenment and the French Revolution on the one hand, and a reactionary combination of Christianity, monarchism and traditionalism on the other. It involved the whole of Europe, and its repercussions were therefore widespread as well as long-lasting. Its scale was unprecedented, and raised a number of issues hitherto unknown in military history. It was also the first modern war, in that the entire Russian people were forced by their own government to participate actively, and popular feeling became an element of military strategy. It is impossible to isolate any of these elements from the others, as the conflict does not make sense without at least an awareness of the depth and breadth of the issues involved.

To do justice to such a subject would take many years, and a book at least twice the length of this one, which is not intended to be in any way a definitive work. It is not a full record of the military operations, which involved dozens of engagements and ranged over a vast area. Nor does it aspire to be any more than an outline of the diplomatic relationship between France and Russia. My principal aim in writing this book has been to tell an extraordinary story, of which everyone has heard but very few have any real knowledge. I have attempted to place it in its wider context and to touch on its deeper significance. Above all, I have tried to convey what these events meant for those concerned, at every level – for this is *par excellence* a human story, of hubris and nemesis, of triumph and catastrophe, of glory and squalor, of joy and suffering.

I have therefore drawn heavily on the first-hand accounts of participants, of which there are a remarkable number. There is much variation between them, in terms of both accuracy and literary quality: some are original letters or diaries; others are memoirs written from diaries; memoirs written from memory, some of them composed within a year or two, others decades later; accounts based on

personal experience and documentation; and regular histories written by participants, some of whom were in key positions, others only witnesses. I have taken these factors into account in making use of them, and I have avoided basing myself too heavily on, for instance, the much-quoted Ségur, who was not a central figure but who wrote as though he had been, and subjected his writing to exalted literary pretensions; I also avoid his main critic, Gourgaud, who was himself not as well placed to know what was going on as he suggests, and who subjects his account to uncritical worship of Napoleon.

I have been driven by the same desire to reproduce the human experience in my choice of illustrations, and in this I have been aided by another unique aspect of this war. This was the only campaign before the age of photography to have been graphically recorded by a number of participants, some of whom were distinguished artists. Not until the American Civil War, half a century later, would the realities of war be conveyed through such vivid insights. In view of this, I decided to dispense with the array of pompous and largely meaningless battle scenes that usually adorn this kind of book, and to concentrate on providing something more akin to a photographic record of life on campaign. Apart from the small number of portraits of the main protagonists, almost every image was drawn or painted by a participant, either on the spot or from memory, and the few exceptions to this were executed under the direction of participants.

Where I feel a quotation or a statement of fact needs it, I have given references to other first-hand accounts which support it. But in order to keep down the quantity of reference numbers on the page, I have often lumped together several quotations or a series of linked facts contained in a single paragraph under the same one. The translations are all mine, except in cases where the book was only available to me in another's translation, and in the case of the translations from German, in which I was helped by others.

There are several methods of transliterating Russian words and names, none of which is, to my mind, completely satisfactory. This is mainly because they attempt consistency where none is possible, and also because every new scheme necessarily outlaws words based on previous methods that have already become familiar. I have therefore followed my own instinct and what I believe to be common sense. I realise that specialists may find this irritating.

I have transliterated Russian names as they are pronounced, preferring Yermolov to Ermolov, or as they have been known in the West for decades, sticking to Tolstoy rather than Tol'stoi, Galitzine rather than Golitsuin. I have stuck to the -sky ending for Russian names as opposed to the -skii, for the same reasons. But I have observed the universally accepted new spelling in the bibliography, since that is how the names appear in (most) library catalogues. In the cases of non-Russians serving in the Russian army, I use the original spelling, as I see no reason to turn a Wittgenstein into Vitgenshtain, a Czaplic into a Chaplits, or a Clausewitz into a Klausevits, except in the cases of Baggovut (Swedish Baggehuffwudt) and Miloradovich (Serbian Miloradovic), for purely pragmatic reasons.

Perhaps the most difficult question is that of place names. The action of the campaign unfolds over territories which had recently passed from one sovereignty to another, and sometimes back again, and which are now in entirely new countries. I have used German names for what was then East Prussia. I have used Russian names for Russia beyond Smolensk (except for St Petersburg and Moscow). I have used Polish forms and spellings for places in the Grand Duchy of Warsaw, and transliterated Polish names on the territory which had been Polish in the decades before 1812. I have done this because the French used these forms in their accounts (albeit with curious spellings). The Russian forms of these names hardly differ from the Polish, while the present-day Lithuanian or Belarussian ones would be confusing (I have enclosed a brief glossary of these names with their present-day forms, for purposes of identification). I have made an exception of the capital of Lithuania: the French mostly spelt it Wilna, the Russians called it Vilna, and the Polish Wilno would seem out of place, particularly if transliterated into Vilno – so I have opted for Vilna. For similar reasons, I have preferred the Russian Glubokoie to the Polish Głebokie, which would be transliterated as Gwembokie.

All dates are given in the new style, according to the Gregorian calendar.

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Above all I want to thank my wife Emma, for everything.

1
Caesar

As the first cannon shot thundered out from the guns drawn up before the Invalides on the morning of 20 March 1811, an extraordinary silence fell over Paris. Wagons and carriages came to a standstill, pedestrians halted, people appeared at their windows, schoolboys looked up from their books. Everyone began to count as the discharges succeeded each other at a measured pace. In the stables of the École Militaire, the cavalry of the Guard were grooming their horses. 'Suddenly, the sound of a gun from the Invalides stopped every arm, suspended every movement; brushes and curry-combs hung in the air,' according to one young *Chasseur*. 'In the midst of this multitude of men and horses, you could have heard a mouse stir.'[1]

As news had spread on the previous evening that the Empress had gone into labour, many *patrons* had given their workmen the next day off, and these swarmed expectantly in the streets around the Tuileries palace. The Paris *Bourse* had ceased dealing that morning, and the only financial transactions taking place were bets on the sex of the child. But the excitement was just as great among those who had nothing riding on it.

'It would be difficult to imagine with what anxiety the first cannon shots were counted,' recalled one witness: everyone knew that twenty-one would announce the birth of a girl, and one hundred that of a boy. 'A profound silence reigned until the twenty-first, but when the twenty-second roared forth, there was an explosion of congratulation and cheering which rang out simultaneously in every part of Paris.'[2] People went wild, embracing total strangers and shouting '*Vive l'Empereur!*' Others danced in the streets as the remaining seventy-eight shots thundered out in a rolling barrage.

'Paris had never, even on the greatest holidays, offered a picture of more general joyfulness,' noted another witness; 'there was celebration everywhere.'[3] A balloon went up, bearing into the sky the celebrated aeronaut Madame Blanchard with thousands of printed notices of the happy tidings, which she scattered across the countryside. Messengers galloped off in all directions with the news. That evening there were fireworks and the capital was illuminated, with candles in the windows of even humble mansard rooms. Theatres staged special performances, printmakers began churning out soppy images of the imperial infant borne on celestial clouds with crowns and laurels hovering over him, and poets set to work on commemorative odes. 'But what one will never be able to convey adequately,' wrote the young Comte de Ségur, 'is the wild intoxication of that surge of public rejoicing as the twenty-second cannon shot announced to France that there had been born a direct heir to Napoleon and to the Empire!'[4]

The twenty-year-old Empress Marie-Louise had felt the first pains at around seven o'clock on the previous evening. Dr Antoine Dubois, *Premier Accoucheur* of the Empire, was on hand. He was soon joined by Dr Corvisart, the First Physician, Dr Bourdier, the Physician-in-Ordinary to the Empress, and Napoleon's surgeon Dr Yvan. The Emperor, his mother and sisters, and the various ladies of the Empress's household brought to twenty-two the number of those attending her, either in her bedroom or in the next chamber.

Beyond that, the salons of the Tuileries were filled with some two hundred officials and dignitaries, who had been summoned at the first signs of the Empress going into labour and stood about awkwardly in full court dress. Every now and then, one of the ladies-in-waiting on duty would come out and give them a progress report. As the evening wore on, small tables were brought in and they were served a light supper of chicken with rice washed down with Chambertin. But the banter was subdued: things were clearly not proceeding smoothly in the Empress's bedroom. At about five in the morning the Grand Marshal of the Empire came out and informed them that the pains had

ceased and the Empress had fallen asleep. He told them they could go home, but must remain on call. Some went, but many of the exhausted courtiers stretched out on benches or rolled up carpets into makeshift mattresses and lay down on them in all their finery to snatch some sleep.

Napoleon had been with Marie-Louise throughout, talking to her and comforting her with all the solicitude of a nervous father-to-be. When she fell asleep Dubois told him he could go and take some rest. Napoleon could do without sleep. His preferred means of relaxation was to lie in a very hot bath, which he believed in as a cure for most of his ailments, be it a cold or constipation, from which he suffered regularly. And that is what he did now.

He had not been luxuriating in the hot water for long when Dubois came running up the concealed stairs that led from his apartment to the Empress's bedroom. The labour pains had started again, and the doctor was anxious, as the baby was presenting itself awkwardly. Napoleon asked him if there was any danger. Dubois nodded, expressing dismay that such a complication had occurred with the Empress. 'Forget that she is Empress, and treat her as you would the wife of any shopkeeper in the rue Saint Denis,' Napoleon interrupted him, adding: 'And whatever happens, save the mother!' He got out of his bath, dressed hastily and went down to join the doctors at his wife's bedside.

The Empress screamed when she saw Dubois take out his forceps, but Napoleon calmed her, holding her hand and stroking her while the Comtesse de Montesquiou and Dr Corvisart held her still. The baby emerged feet first, and Dubois had a job getting the head clear. After much pulling and easing, at around six in the morning he delivered it. The baby appeared lifeless, and Dubois laid it aside as he and the others attended to the mother, who seemed to be in danger. But Corvisart picked up the child and began to rub him briskly. After about seven minutes of this he came to life, and the doctor handed him to the Comtesse de Montesquiou, with the comment that it was a boy. Napoleon, who could see that Marie-Louise was by now out of danger, took the baby in his arms and, bursting into the adjoining room where all the senior officers of the Empire were gathered, expecting the worst, exclaimed: 'Behold the King of Rome! Two hundred cannon shots!'

But when his sister-in-law, Queen Hortense, came up to congratulate him a moment later, he replied: 'I cannot feel the happiness – the poor woman has suffered so much!'[5] He meant it. They had been married for just one year, and the arranged match had quickly turned into an almost cloyingly loving relationship. One of thirteen children of the Austrian Emperor Francis II, Marie-Louise had been her father's favourite, his '*adorable poupée*'. She had been brought up to hate Napoleon and to refer to him as 'the Corsican', 'the usurper', 'Attila' or 'the Antichrist'. But, when diplomacy demanded it, she bowed to her father's will. And once she had tasted the pleasures of the marital bed there was no restraining her enthusiasm for the Emperor. Napoleon, who had been thrilled at the idea of having in his bed 'a daughter of the Caesars', as he referred to her – and one half his age – quickly became moonstruck, and their marriage turned into a middle-class idyll.

That evening, as the capital celebrated, the child was baptised according to the age-old rites of the French royal family. The next day Napoleon held a grand audience, seated on the imperial throne, to receive formal congratulations. The entire court then accompanied him to see the infant, who lay in a superb silver-gilt cradle presented by the city of Paris. It had been designed by the artist Pierre Prudhon and represented a figure of Glory holding a triumphal crown and a young eagle ascending towards the bright star which symbolised Napoleon. The chancellors of the Légion d'Honneur and of the Iron Cross laid the insignia of both orders on cushions beside the sleeping child. The painter François Gérard set to work on a portrait.

Over the next days homage of every kind poured in, and cities throughout the country joined Paris in celebrating as the news reached them, each in turn sending a delegation to deliver its congratulations. The same process was repeated as the news rippled out to the more far-flung parts of the Empire and to other countries. Such expressions were to be expected in the circumstances. But there was a great deal more to the celebrations and congratulations than just loyal humbug – to most Frenchmen the birth of a boy heralded a period of peace and stability, and much more besides.

France had been at war virtually without interruption for nineteen years. She had been attacked, in 1792, by a coalition of Prussia and Austria. Over the next years these were joined by Britain, Spain, Russia and other lesser powers, all of them bent on defeating revolutionary France and restoring the Bourbon dynasty. It was not a fight over territory. It was an ideological struggle over the future order of Europe. Atrocities aside, revolutionary France had brought into public life all the ideals of the Enlightenment, and her very existence was seen by the monarchical powers as a threat to theirs. She had made ample use of this weapon in order to defend herself, by exporting revolution and subverting provinces belonging to her enemies. She had gradually turned from victim to aggressor, but she was nevertheless fighting for survival. Revolutionary France could not secure a lasting peace, as virtually every other power in Europe would not reconcile itself to the survival of the republican regime, and felt a necessity to destroy it.

General Napoleon Bonaparte's seizure of power in Paris in November 1799 should have broken this vicious circle of fear and aggression. He reined in the demagogues, closed the Pandora's box opened by the revolution and tidied up the mess. Being a child of the Enlightenment as well as a despot, he mobilised the energies of France and harnessed them to the task of building a well-ordered, prosperous and powerful state, the '*état police*' of which the *philosophes* of the Enlightenment had dreamed. He was following in the footsteps of rulers such as Frederick the Great of Prussia, Catherine the Great of Russia and Joseph II of Austria, who had introduced social and economic reforms while strengthening the framework of the state, and who were universally admired for this. But to their successors, Bonaparte was but a grotesque upstart, a malignant outgrowth of the evil revolution.

By 1801, following a series of resounding victories, Bonaparte was able to force peace on all the powers of the European continent. France's security was guaranteed by expanded frontiers and the creation of a series of theoretically autonomous republics in northern Italy, Switzerland and Holland which were in fact French provinces. In March 1802 Bonaparte even concluded the Peace of Amiens with Britain. But this was not likely to last.

To Britain, France's hegemony in Europe was intolerable. To France, Britain's superiority at sea was a constant threat. French designs on Malta, Egypt and India were a hazy but nevertheless haunting nightmare to Britain, while Britain's ability to use allies on the European mainland to make war by proxy was a source of continuing anxiety to France. Hostilities between the two resumed in May 1803.

During the following year Bonaparte himself revived opposition to his rule throughout Europe. In March 1804 he ordered the young Bourbon Duc d'Enghien to be seized at Ettenheim in the state of Baden just outside the borders of France and brought to Paris. He was convinced that the Duke was involved in a conspiracy to overthrow him and restore the monarchy, and had him executed after a summary judgement. This violation of every accepted law and principle horrified Europe. It confirmed the opinion of those who saw Bonaparte as the devil incarnate, and reinforced the notion of a fight to the death between the sanctified order as embodied in the *ancien régime* and the forces of evil in the form of revolutionary France.

France was in fact no longer exporting revolution. She had become little more than a vehicle for the ambitions of Bonaparte, who a couple of months later proclaimed himself Emperor of the French under the name of Napoleon I. What exactly these ambitions consisted of has perplexed and divided historians over two centuries, for Napoleon was never consistent in anything. His utterances can at best be taken to illustrate some of his thoughts and feelings, while his actions were often erratic and contradictory. He was intelligent and pragmatic, yet he allowed himself to indulge the most far-fetched fantasies; he was the ultimate opportunist, yet he could get caught up in his own dogma; he was a great cynic, yet he pursued romantic dreams. There was no grand idea or master project.

Napoleon was in large measure driven by nothing more complicated than the lust for power and domination over others. Attendant on this was an often childish set of reactions at being thwarted in any way. Having no sense of justice and no respect for the wishes of others, he took any objection

to his actions as gratuitous rebellion, and responded with disproportionate vehemence. Instead of ignoring a minor setback or turning an obstacle, he would unleash bluster and force, which often involved him in unnecessarily costly head-on collisions.

He was also driven by a curious sense of destiny, a self-invented notion of a kind often affected by young men brought up on Romantic literature (his favourite reading had been the poems of Ossian and *The Sorrows of Young Werther)*, which he came to believe in himself. 'Is there a man blind enough not to see,' he had declared during his Egyptian campaign in 1798, 'that destiny directs all my operations?'[6] Napoleon was also a great admirer of the plays of Corneille, and there is reason to believe he saw himself as acting out some great tragedy in their mould.

This sense of living out a destiny was to lead him repeatedly into acting against his better judgement in pursuit of nebulous dreams. His triumphs in Italy, followed by his spectacular victories at Austerlitz and Jena, only confirmed him in this fantasy, which communicated itself to his troops. 'The intoxication of our joyful and proud exaltation was at its height,' wrote one young officer after Napoleon's triumph over Prussia. 'One of our army corps proclaimed itself "the Tenth Legion of the New Caesar"!, another demanded that Napoleon should henceforth be known as "The Emperor of the West!"'[7]

But Napoleon was also the ruler of France. As such, he was inevitably driven by the same political, cultural and psychological motors which had dictated the policies of French rulers of the past such as François I and Louis XIV, who had striven for French hegemony over Europe in order to achieve lasting security.

France had always sought to impose a balance in central Europe that would prevent a major mobilisation of German forces against her, and she had achieved this by the Treaty of Westphalia back in 1648, in which she and Austria, jointly with a number of other powers, had put in place a whole series of checks and balances. This system had been undone in the second half of the eighteenth century by the rise of Prussian power and the emergence of Russia as a player in European affairs, manifested most critically in huge shifts of power in Germany, the partition and disappearance of Poland, and the race for control of the Balkans. In view of this, it was quite natural that Napoleon should seek to reassert French interests, and in doing so he was pursuing a traditional vision of a 'French' Europe as much as his own personal ambition. It was a vision that appeared to have history on its side.

In the eighteenth century France had become the cynosure of Europe in terms of culture and political thought. Her paramountcy in these spheres was consolidated by the revolution, whose fundamental message and ideas were admired and accepted by élites all over the Continent. The French political and military classes saw themselves as '*la Grande Nation*', the first nation in Europe to have emancipated itself, and considered themselves to be armed with a mission to carry the benefits of what they had achieved to other peoples. This was the age of neo-Classicism, and they began to see France as the next Rome, the fount from which this new ideological civilisation radiated, the capital of the modern world.

Napoleon was not immune to the enthusiasms of his age. As befitted the most powerful individual since the days of the Caesars, he issued decrees ordering the cleaning of the Tiber and the Forum Romanum, and the preservation of its monuments. Shortly after the birth of the King of Rome, he set in motion plans for an imperial palace on the Capitol. But he also intended to build one for the Pope in Paris, arguing that this was where he should move, just as St Peter had moved to Rome from the Holy Land.[8]

As early as the mid-1790s, the French revolutionary armies began to bring home to Paris not only valuables and works of art, but also libraries, scientific instruments and entire archives. This epic bout of looting was not the product of mere greed. The idea was that everything most useful to the development of civilisation should be concentrated at the heart of the Empire, and not allowed

to benefit only a few in outlying provinces. 'The French Empire shall become the metropolis of all other sovereignties,' Napoleon once said to a friend. 'I want to force every king in Europe to build a large palace for his use in Paris. When an Emperor of the French is crowned, these kings shall come to Paris, and they shall adorn that imposing ceremony with their presence and salute it with their homage.' It was not so much a question of France '*über alles*'. 'European society needs a regeneration,' Napoleon asserted in conversation in 1805. 'There must be a superior power which dominates all the other powers, with enough authority to force them to live in harmony with one another – and France is the best placed for that purpose.' He was, like many a tyrant, utopian in his ambitions. 'We must have a European legal system, a European appeal court, a common currency, the same weights and measures, the same laws,' Napoleon once said to Joseph Fouché. 'I must make of all the peoples of Europe one people, and of Paris the capital of the world.'[9]

France's claim to the mantle of Imperial Rome seemed to gain validation when, in 1810, Napoleon married Marie-Louise, daughter of the last Holy Roman Emperor Francis II. His father-in-law, now Emperor of Austria under the name of Francis I, appeared to acquiesce in this transference of power. When Napoleon produced an heir, Francis ceded to the child the title of King of Rome, which had traditionally been that of the son of the Holy Roman Emperor.

France's position on the Continent was by then one of unprecedented power; her political culture and the new system were imposed over vast areas of Europe. But to the average Frenchman this was of less interest than the benefits the past decade had brought him at home. All the most positive gains of the revolution had been salvaged, but order, prosperity and stability had been guaranteed, and a general amnesia if not amnesty had allowed those divided by the struggles of the revolution to put the more unpleasant aspects of the past behind them. Whether this new order would survive depended not only on Napoleon's ability to defend it, but on his ability to guarantee its continuance by cancelling out the possibility of a Bourbon restoration. A return of the Bourbons would mean not only a return to the *ancien régime*; it would also raise the prospect of much score-settling.

In this respect, the birth of the King of Rome was crucial. Most of Napoleon's subjects believed that their ruler, who had recently turned forty, would henceforth be inclined to spend more time with his family than with his armies, that Napoleon the Great would in time be succeeded by Napoleon II, and that the rest of Europe would accept that the Bourbons had been consigned to history. That was why they rejoiced. 'People sincerely anticipated a period of profound peace; the idea of war and occupations of that sort were no longer entertained as being realistic,' wrote Napoleon's chief of police, General Savary, adding that the child appeared to all as the guarantor of political stability.[10]

Napoleon himself rejoiced for much the same reasons. 'Now begins the finest epoch of my reign,' he exclaimed. He had always been keenly aware that a man who seizes the throne can never rest easy on it, and that he could only achieve security of tenure by means of the dynastic principle. 'With the birth of my son, there is a future in my destiny,' he told one of his diplomatic agents. 'I am now founding a legitimacy. Empires are created by the sword and are conserved by heredity.'[11]

But he was not yet ready to lay down his arms. He had managed to destroy the unity of purpose which had fed the coalitions against France for so long. Austria, Russia and Prussia were now as ready to fight each other as to fight France, the original repugnance to treat with 'the Corsican upstart' had largely evaporated, his imperial title was recognised across the Continent, and the Bourbon pretender Louis XVIII was beginning to look like an anachronism. Yet Napoleon was keenly aware of his continuing vulnerability, for nothing had been finally settled.

Over the past decade he had turned France into an empire which included the whole of Belgium, Holland and the North Sea coast up to Hamburg, the Rhineland, the whole of Switzerland, Piedmont, Liguria, Tuscany, the Papal States, Illyria and Catalonia, and ruled directly over some forty-five million people. The French Empire was surrounded by a number of dependent states – the

Kingdom of Westphalia, the kingdoms of Saxony, Bavaria, Württemberg and other states grouped in the Confederation of the Rhine, the Grand Duchy of Warsaw, the kingdoms of Italy, Naples and Spain, ruled by Napoleon's siblings, relatives or devoted allies. The only part of his vast imperium where there was open unrest was in Spain, where armed opposition to his brother King Joseph was being supported by a British army. This was not in itself a major problem, and could be dealt with by a concerted operation under his own direction.

The real problem facing Napoleon was how to achieve some kind of finality and to fit all his conquests into a system that would guarantee his and his successors' position. While others regarded him as a megalomaniac bent on conquering all, he saw his wars as defensive, aimed at guaranteeing France's security as well as his own. 'To leave my throne to my heirs,' he told one of his chamberlains, 'I will have had to be master of all the capitals of Europe!' In the written instructions to one of his diplomatic envoys, he explained that although France

was at the height of her power, 'if she cannot fix the political constitution of Europe now, she may tomorrow lose all the advantages of her position and fail in her enterprises'.[12]

But a final settlement that would secure his gains for the future eluded him, partly because he kept expanding its scope, meaning it to be comprehensive, and partly because war was his element; he could not see his way to achieving his ends by other means. That was why all his treaties to date were no more than truces, and all his arrangements remained fluid pending the elusive ultimate peace settlement. The Empire was a work in progress.

At the time of the birth of his son, Napoleon was forty-two years old. He was five feet two inches tall, which was small even at the time, but he had a well-proportioned figure. 'His complexion had never had much colour; his cheeks were of a matt white, giving him a full, pale face, but not of the kind of pallor that denotes a sick person,' wrote his secretary Baron Fain. 'His brown hair was cut short all over and lay flat over his head. His head was round, his forehead was large and high; his eyes were grey-blue, with a gentle look in them. He had a handsome nose, a graceful mouth and beautiful teeth.' But he had recently begun to put on weight. His body filled out, his neck, which was short anyway, thickened, and he developed a paunch. Those close to him noted that his eyes grew

less piercing. He spoke more slowly and took longer to make decisions. His phenomenal powers of concentration diminished, and those used to his fits of fury were surprised to find him growing more pensive and hesitant. Something was eating away at the vital force of this Promethean creature. It has been convincingly suggested that his pituitary gland failed as he reached the age of forty, causing dystrophia adiposogenitalis, a condition that leads to weight gain and loss of energy.[13]

It is impossible to say whether Napoleon himself was aware of any decline. His enemies had certainly noted that his victories were no longer as resounding as they had been, and he must have realised this as well. Even if this was not quite the twilight of his life, the end of his active career could not be that far off, so the final battles would have to be fought soon and a permanent settlement put in place in the near future.

The principal obstacle to such a settlement was Britain, with which France had become locked in a self-perpetuating duel. With her control of the seas, Britain could cripple French trade and support resistance anywhere on the European mainland, as she was currently doing in Spain. After the annihilation of his fleet at Trafalgar in 1805 Napoleon could not hope to confront the British navy in battle. He had therefore decided to ruin her economically, by closing the whole Continent to her trade.

The idea was not new. It was one of the fundamental French beliefs that Britain's wealth came not from herself but from her colonies, which supplied commodities she could sell on to Europe at vast profit. Every conflict between Britain and France over the past century had included a tariff war, and the revolutionary government and the Directory inherited this tradition. As there was widespread commercial jealousy of Britain, this was a popular policy. Napoleon carried on this tradition, setting ever higher tariffs and eventually banning all British trade from the Continent.

In theory, the French policy was bound to bring about economic hardship in Britain that would undermine support for her war effort. The Whigs, currently in opposition, had sympathised with the revolution in France and opposed the waging of war against her, and many admired Napoleon himself. Although they were in a minority, their calls for peace with France might well have carried the day if British trade had really begun to suffer. But in the long run, France probably suffered more than Britain. And Napoleon's Continental System, as he called it, was in effect unenforceable. Smuggling and corruption holed it even in French ports, while some of France's dependent states and allies were hardly enforcing it at all.

Worse, it imposed real hardships on the populations of subject and allied states. Nowhere more so than in the very area France most needed to control. Germany was feeling the cost very keenly, and political discontent was mounting. Although most of the sovereigns who ruled there were strongly attached to the French cause, the mood of their people might make them think twice if an alternative became possible. Such a situation might arise if French power were challenged, but there were only two powers capable of mounting such a challenge – Britain, which could not gain a serious foothold on mainland Europe, and Russia, which was an ally of France.

But Russia was not a happy ally, and nobody realised better than Napoleon that if she were to break out and challenge his authority, Britain could never be brought to the negotiating table, and the whole of Germany would be destabilised. Russia was therefore the key, and she would have to be brought back on side before any final settlement could be achieved. What he could not appreciate was that it was already far too late for that, and that even as French society was looking forward to a golden age of peace, Russia was coming to see war with France as unavoidable, desirable even, while her ruler was entertaining dreams of his own for the regeneration of Europe.

2
Alexander

When Catherine the Great came to the throne, exactly half a century before 1812, Russia had been of little significance outside the immediate area of eastern Europe. Peter the Great had done much to modernise his kingdom, and he put it on the map by building a fancy new capital at St Petersburg. In 1721 he even awarded himself the title of Emperor. But he was succeeded by a series of largely ineffectual monarchs, most of them ushered in through disreputable palace revolutions. They were feared by their subjects but generally despised by the other rulers of Europe, none of whom recognised the imperial title Peter had assumed.

Catherine changed all that. She worked hard at organising the state, involved herself in the affairs of Europe, and initiated an aggressive foreign policy which over the next fifty years was to add the whole of Finland, what are now Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Belarus and Ukraine, most of Poland, the Crimea, some of what is now Romania, the Kuban, Georgia, Kabardia, Azerbaidjan, parts of Siberia, Chukchi and Kamchatka to her dominions, as well as part of Alaska and a military settlement just north of San Francisco. This not only increased the size and population of Russia, it also brought her frontiers six hundred kilometres further into Europe and her rulers into European affairs. By 1799 Russian armies were operating in Switzerland and Italy. In a memorandum to Catherine's successor Paul I, the Russian Chancellor Fyodor Vasilievich Rostopchin wrote: 'Russia, as much by her position as by her inexhaustible resources, is and must be the first power in the world.'[1] It was a constant aim of Russian policy to extend that power over the Balkans, Ottoman Turkey and into the Mediterranean.

Many in Europe were alarmed at this seemingly inexorable onward march of Russian power. There was talk of ravening Asiatic hordes and some fear, particularly after the first partition of Poland in 1772, that Russia might engulf the whole of Europe as the barbarians had done with ancient Rome. 'Poland was but a breakfast … where will they dine?' Edmund Burke wondered, echoing the fears of

many.[2] Diplomats were struck by the single-mindedness and ruthlessness of Russia's foreign policy: she did not play by the same rules as others. What few appreciated was the extent to which Russia saw herself as a special case.

When Ivan IV, popularly known as the Terrible, was crowned in the Uspensky cathedral in the Kremlin in 1547, he took the title of Tsar (Caesar) and laid claim to the legacy of Byzantium. 'Ivan was claiming not only sovereignty, independence from other powers,' in the words of Geoffrey Hosking, 'but the actual superiority of his realm, as the universal Christian monarchy, to all others on earth.'[3] He used the regalia of Byzantium and had himself depicted alongside Roman emperors. His successors and their political servants remained faithful to this legacy and the mission it imposed. It was not for nothing that Catherine had named her two eldest grandsons Alexander and Constantine.

France had traditionally kept a string of allies in the east – Sweden, Poland and Ottoman Turkey – whose purpose it was to contain the then dominant threat of Habsburg power in central Europe. When Russia began to impinge, she depended on this '*barrière de l'est*' to guard against the new threat developing in the east. But by the end of the eighteenth century, Sweden had declined as a power, Poland had ceased to exist, and Turkey had been pushed out of the Crimea and Moldavia, and was in a state of political decay. France would have to look elsewhere for allies.

In 1801 General Bonaparte, who was then First Consul, decided to make an ally of Russia herself. When, during negotiations on the exchange of prisoners, the British and Austrians refused to accept seven thousand of their Russian allies taken prisoner by the French in Switzerland in exchange for French prisoners they were holding, Bonaparte offered them free to Tsar Paul. He even volunteered to clothe and arm them. Paul, who had previously held everything to do with revolutionary France in abhorrence, was as disarmed by this chivalrous gesture as he was annoyed by the mean-mindedness of his Austrian and British allies. Bonaparte, who knew how much the Russians lusted for a harbour in the Mediterranean, followed this up by offering Paul the island of Malta (which was about to be captured by the British anyway). He would at this stage even have contemplated awarding Constantinople to Russia in order to enlist her support against Britain. He was well on the way to achieving this when, on the night of 23–24 March a group of generals and court officials forced their way into Paul's bedroom in the Mikhailovsky Palace in St Petersburg and murdered him.[4]

Paul had been mentally and emotionally unstable, if not actually mad, and there was an open sense of relief in Russia at his death. Whenever his son and successor Alexander showed himself in public in the first weeks of his reign, he was mobbed by people kissing his hands and clothes, and Pushkin later wrote of 'the magnificent dawn of Alexander's days'. But while he stands out among the monarchs of his day by his generous nature, his lack of vindictiveness and his hatred of injustice and cruelty, Alexander was also marked by severe psychological problems.

Though not unintelligent, he suffered from an inability to think through the consequences of his words and actions. This need not have mattered much had it not been for the education his grandmother, Catherine the Great, had devised for him. She was a despot who admitted no liberal ideas in or near her dominions. Yet alongside mathematicians and priests, she engaged the services of the Swiss republican *philosophe* Frédéric César de La Harpe as tutor for her grandson. The child was subjected to a regime of moral education which consisted of the study of improving stories drawn from the scriptures, history and mythology, as well as a whole canon of secular Enlightenment morality. His limited mind could hardly have been expected to square the religious precepts with the profane, or to accommodate within the despotic reality the radical concepts preached by La Harpe. 'This little boy is a knot of contradictions,' Catherine commented, somewhat disingenuously, after a few years of this diet.[5]

Alexander's principal failings – vanity, weakness and laziness – also need not have mattered much, had it not been for the brand of moral education to which he was subjected, and which expanded his perceived duties well beyond his capacities. He had to keep notebooks, 'archives of

shame', in which he jotted down every failing, every piece of bad behaviour, every loss of temper or lack of diligence in study. 'I am an idler, given over to irresponsibility, incapable of true thought, speech and action,' the twelve-year-old notes on 19 July 1789. 'Egoism is one of my shortcomings, and vanity its main cause; it is easy to see to what they might lead me if I give them a chance to develop,' on 27 August.[6] This continuous self-flagellation only aggravated an innate sense of inadequacy.

When he came to the throne at the age of twenty-three, Alexander was a young man of great charm, burning with desire to improve the world. But as he struggled to live up to what he thought was expected of him, he was undermined by a terrible moral canker. His father's murderers had naturally made him a party to their plans, since it was in order to put him on the throne that they had decided to act. He would claim that he made them swear they would not kill Paul, but he was nevertheless an accomplice in the crime of parricide. He could hardly penalise them, so they continued to hold high office at court and rank in the army. Alexander was racked with guilt for the rest of his life for the part, however passive, he had played in the murder.

He was indeed a mass of contradictions. He claimed to despise the principles of hereditary monarchy, and recoiled before the necessity of assuming power. 'My plan is to settle with my wife on the banks of the Rhine, where I shall live peacefully as a private person finding happiness in the company of friends and in the study of nature,' he confided to one of his friends at the age of nineteen. But he soon fell out of love with his wife and with the notion of a tranquil, private life. He also used to hold forth on the liberal constitutions he was going to introduce. But once he had gained power, he grew jealous of letting anyone else have any say in how things should be done, and notoriously took offence whenever privileges and rights he had granted were actually invoked.[7]

Alexander wanted to bring an element of professionalism into the governance of the Russian empire through the introduction of institutional structures. He reorganised the civil service, making entrance into the higher grades dependent on a university degree or a written exam (which did not endear him to the nobility). He set up ministries and a State Council, which were supposed to help run the country. What he would have liked to introduce was something along the lines of the system Bonaparte was creating in France – authoritarian government mobilising the whole nation in an efficient way along rational and liberal lines. But this would have required emancipating the serfs and breaking down the entire social structure of Russia, and he lacked the nerve to implement it.

Absorbed as he was by internal reforms, Alexander paid little attention to foreign policy. He was horrified by Bonaparte's abduction and judicial murder of the Duc d'Enghien, and joined every other ruler in Europe in robust condemnation of the act. It offended every fibre in his chivalrous nature, and he felt the outrage personally: the Duke of Baden, on whose territory Enghien had been seized, was his father-in-law. He therefore couched his condemnation in grandiloquent terms. But he was made to regret it. The French response was to remind the world that Paul's assassins had not only never been punished, but actually held high office at his son's court, thereby putting in question Alexander's right to point the finger at anyone, in view of the part he had played in the murder of his own father. Alexander was stung, and hated Bonaparte for it. When Bonaparte took the title of Emperor a few months later, Alexander's hatred turned to indignant rage, and the bearer of Peter the Great's invented title denounced that taken by the upstart Corsican.

Alexander believed that Europe had reached a crisis, moral as well as political, and wrote to the British Prime Minister William Pitt suggesting a reorganisation of the Continent into a league of liberal states founded on the sacred rights of humanity. Pitt was not interested in the scheme, but he pandered to Alexander, and, allowing him to dream of greater things, in 1805 managed to enrol him into the third coalition against Napoleon: Austria and Russia were to attack France, and Britain would pay for it.

Russia had no reason for going to war with France, as none of her interests were threatened, and France was Russia's cultural beacon. Russian society was divided on the matter. While those who regarded Napoleon as an evil being who had to be crushed were probably in the majority, there

were plenty who thought otherwise. The former Chancellor Count Rostopchin was vociferous in his criticism, propounding the view that Russia was being used by Britain; his future successor, Count Nikolai Rumiantsev, regarded France as Russia's natural ally. Napoleon had many admirers in Russia, particularly among the young – some of whom would be drinking his health even after the war had begun.[8]

But Alexander had come to see the whole question as part of a wider moral issue. He had assumed the role of knightly defender of a Christian monarchical tradition against the onslaught of the new barbarism as represented by Napoleon. An element of emulation also came into it, for he longed to distinguish himself on the battlefield. He had inherited his father's love of parades and the minutiae of military life – he was always checking details of uniforms and drill – and believed that a Tsar's place was at the head of his troops. He therefore insisted on setting off to war in person, although he gave overall command of his armies to the only experienced general to hand, the fifty-eight-year-old Mikhail Ilarionovich Kutuzov.

Kutuzov had first seen action against Polish insurgents, and subsequently distinguished himself in several campaigns against Turkey. In 1773 in the Crimea he had received a bullet in the head which severed the muscles behind his right eye, causing it to sag in a grotesque way; eventually he lost sight in it. Kutuzov had been military governor of St Petersburg at the time of the murder of Tsar Paul, so he knew a thing or two about that. This was not the least of the reasons for which Alexander feared and resented him, and as a result he dismissed him and exiled him to his country estate. There, Kutuzov relieved his boredom and his rheumatic pains with drink and whatever sexual solace the rural retreat could provide his notorious appetite. And it was there, in the summer of 1805, that he suddenly received the order to take command of the army and join forces with the Austrians.

The army was not ready, so Kutuzov set off with an advance guard to reinforce the Austrian General Mack. Napoleon acted with speed and surrounded Mack, forcing him to surrender at Ulm while Kutuzov was still on the march. Massively outnumbered, Kutuzov was obliged to fall back and join up with the Russian main army, led by Alexander, and the remainder of the Austrian forces under the Emperor Francis.

Napoleon had never seen any good reason for France and Russia to fight, and was convinced that Alexander had been manipulated by Britain into joining the coalition. He therefore sent General Savary to the Tsar with the suggestion that they get together and sort out any differences amicably. But Alexander haughtily declined, famously addressing his reply to 'the Head of the French Government', as he could not stomach acknowledging Napoleon's imperial title.

Kutuzov wanted to retreat further, but Alexander was determined to fight, and obliged him to give battle at Austerlitz on 2 December. Like a subaltern playing at being commander, Alexander overruled Kutuzov's suggestions and made him adopt a plan devised by one of the Austrian generals. On the day, he bossed and chivvied Kutuzov for the slowness of his deployment, and then watched in horror as the allied army was routed. Forced to flee from the battlefield, Alexander was mortified. 'He was himself even more thoroughly defeated at Austerlitz than his army,' according to the French diplomat Joseph de Maistre.[9] The Tsar now resented Kutuzov all the more, and dismissed him from his command, giving him the minor post of Governor of Kiev.

Austria sued for peace, but the war went on, as Prussia joined the coalition. The thirty-five-year-old King Frederick William III had sat on the fence, until his beautiful and spirited wife Louise had finally induced him to come out against Napoleon. But in a whirlwind campaign in October 1806 his renowned army was routed at Jena and Auerstädt, and he had to flee his capital of Berlin. Napoleon entered the city and pursued Frederick William, who took refuge in East Prussia at the side of the Russian army, now under the command of General Lev Bennigsen.

Alexander showed remarkable determination in adversity. He raised more troops, and in 1807 called up a peasant militia. But he had to take precautions to ensure that these serfs would remain loyal to a system that kept them enslaved. News of the revolutionary happenings in France over the

past fifteen years was slow to spread among the uneducated peasants of central and eastern Europe. But that very slowness meant that it often mingled with local legend and even religious millenarian longings as it went, with the result that the figure of Napoleon was sometimes confused with a number of mythic folk heroes, lending him the attributes not only of a liberator, but of a messiah as well. The Russian authorities were well aware of this, and prepared accordingly as the French armies drew close to the boundaries of the empire.

While calling on a high official in 1806 the writer Sergei Glinka had been intrigued to see a civil servant clutching a copy of the Apocalypse. There was a long tradition in Russia of associating the enemy with the Antichrist in order to raise the fighting spirit of the soldiers, and now the authorities had hit on the idea of substituting Napoleon for the rulers of the abyss, Abaddon and Apollyon. In November 1806 the Holy Synod of the Russian Orthodox Church issued a thundering denunciation of Napoleon, accusing him of taking on the role and the name of Messiah and conspiring with Jews and other evil people against the Christian faith. The clergy also made much of the fact that when in Egypt Napoleon had declared his regard for Islam – it must be remembered that the Russians had been in a semi-permanent state of war with Muslim Tatars and Turks, which they saw as a kind of crusade. Thus the average soldier and peasant was given the impression that Napoleon was in league with all the devils of hell.[10]

But the crusade against him was cut short. In January 1807 Bennigsen lost 25,000 men in a fierce engagement at Eylau, and he was routed by Napoleon at Friedland in June. Alexander faced a stark choice. He could either fall back and try to regroup, which would involve letting the enemy into his own empire, or he could come to terms with Napoleon. His army was unpaid, unfed and badly officered, and the territory he would be falling back through, which had only been taken from Poland ten years before, was full of potential partisans.

On 24 June 1807 Alexander sent General Lobanov-Rostovsky to Napoleon's headquarters at Tilsit on the river Niemen with a personal message saying that he would be delighted to make not just peace but an alliance with him. 'An entirely new system must replace the one which has existed up to now, and I flatter myself that we will easily reach an understanding with the Emperor Napoleon, provided that we meet without intermediaries,' he wrote.[11]

Negotiations began the next day. A tented pavilion was constructed for the purpose on a raft moored in the middle of the Niemen. Alexander turned up in his most fetching uniform, determined to charm Napoleon and get himself out of the desperate straits he was in. For his part, Napoleon wanted to seduce Alexander in order to break up the coalition once and for all, and in the process gain a useful pawn in his struggle against Britain.

Alexander may have had great charm, but Napoleon was the better manipulator of men. He flattered Alexander shamelessly, treating him as an equal. He also spared no occasion of driving a wedge between him and his Prussian ally. Frederick William III had not been allowed on to the raft, and on the day negotiations opened he could be seen watching from the Russian bank, even at one stage edging his horse forward until it had water up to its chest, as though trying to eavesdrop. On the next day Napoleon relented and allowed Alexander to present Frederick William to him, but he was curt and did not invite him to the dinner he was giving for the Tsar that evening. He repeatedly told Alexander that he was only leaving the wretched King on his throne in deference to his, Alexander's, wishes. However much he might have been pained or shocked by such insults to a brother monarch, Alexander could not fail to be flattered at the difference in the status accorded to the two by Napoleon.

While the foreign ministers of both states negotiated the actual treaties, Napoleon and Alexander assisted at parades, went out for walks, drives and rides; they sat up together after dinner, talking far into the night. Napoleon would let drop the odd phrase about how Russia's frontier really ought to be on the Vistula, about a possible mutual carve-up of Turkey, about the two of them resolving all the problems of Europe together. He pandered to Alexander's dreams of reforming the world. He would unfold maps of Europe and Asia, and together they would speculate on ideal

solutions to the world's ills through some monumental territorial rearrangement. Napoleon told of how he had modernised France, giving Alexander the impression that he too could achieve great things, that all the self-flagellation he had been obliged to perform before his tutor would finally be vindicated by some magnificent act.[12]

Alexander had grown up hating Napoleon and all he stood for, as did his family and court. On the day of the first meeting on the raft, his sister Catherine wrote to him vehemently denouncing Napoleon as a liar and a monster, urging him to have no truck whatever with him. But there is no doubt that the flattery of the conqueror of Europe, however monstrous he might be, had worked its magic. For Alexander, unsure of himself, aware of his inadequacies, brought up to think of himself as a failure, to be treated as an equal by a man who had achieved so much, whose very name made Europe tremble, was strong liquor. The subaltern sat at the table of the most successful general in history. 'Just imagine my spending days with Bonaparte, talking for hours quite alone with him!' he wrote back to Catherine. 'I ask you, does not all this seem like a dream?'[13]

And while Napoleon had set out with the most cynical attitude, he too seems to have fallen for Alexander's boyish charm and enjoyed being with him in an elder-brotherly way. They were also to some extent carried away by the epic nature of the proceedings. Their meeting on the raft, in full view of two great armies drawn up in parade uniforms on either bank; the banquets at which the two most powerful men in Europe drank each other's health and embraced, pledging to build a better world; the grenadiers of both armies mingling to drink the health of the emperors of the Orient and the Occident; the touching scenes as Napoleon, having asked the Russians to name their bravest ranker, pinned the order of the Légion d'Honneur on his breast, a gesture reciprocated by Alexander with the Cross of St George – were all so much playacting. But it was grand spectacle, and actors are notorious for being taken in by their own histrionics.[14]

In the treaties signed on 7 July at the conclusion of these three weeks of posturing, Russia ceded the Ionian Islands to France, but received a small part of Poland in return. She agreed to pull her troops out of the Danubian Principalities, while France negotiated a settlement with Turkey on her behalf. Most importantly, she allied herself with France in the war with Britain, promising to close her ports to all British trade unless Britain made a speedy peace with France by the end of the year.

The obvious loser at Tilsit was Prussia. Frederick William was only just allowed to keep his throne, in deference to the wishes of Alexander. He had to give up most of the territory Prussia had taken from Poland in the past decades, to pay France a huge indemnity for having made war on her, to reduce his army to a symbolic force, and to accommodate French garrisons all over his kingdom. With the Polish lands taken from Prussia, Napoleon formed the Grand Duchy of Warsaw, a new French satellite.

Considering he had been obliged to sue for peace, Tilsit was a triumph for Alexander: he had managed to avoid being treated as a defeated party. But a closer look at the treaty revealed it to be not a peace settlement, but the initiation of a new war and the foundation of a partnership, one which bound Russia more than it bound France. All the exciting nocturnal talk remained vapour hanging in the air, while Russia had committed herself to make economic war on Britain. And while the stationing of French troops on her territory was a humiliation and an expense for Prussia, it was clear to all but the most naïve that they were there to keep Russia in check and to shore up the newly-founded Grand Duchy of Warsaw. This in itself was an open challenge to Russia. It was tiny, but it was a potential kernel for the resurrection of the Polish state which had been wiped off the map only a decade before, and a chunk of which currently formed the whole western belt of the Russian empire.

Whatever else he had managed to save, Alexander did not have to wait long to find out that he had not, as far as his subjects were concerned, saved his face or Russia's honour. His sister Catherine called the treaty a humiliating climbdown, and his mother refused his embrace when he returned to St Petersburg. The court, already disapproving of his desertion of the popular Empress Elizabeth for

his mistress Maria Antonovna Naryshkina, sensed a betrayal. The traditionalist aristocracy opposed any negotiation with the despised 'upstart' and saw the treaty as a sell-out. Many felt Alexander had been made a fool of by Napoleon. The playwright Vladislav Aleksandrovich Ozerov wrote *Dmitry Donskoi*, a play whose historical heroics, applauded frantically by full houses, made Alexander look ineffectual.

Although the Russian army had been beaten by Napoleon, the younger officers felt a new confidence and entertained dreams of fighting on to ultimate victory, and consequently felt betrayed. The soldiers could not understand why their Tsar was suddenly embracing as an ally the man they had been told was the Antichrist. A vigorous whispering campaign against Alexander's conduct of policy was initiated by General Wilson, a British adviser formerly attached to the Russian army. Rumours of plots to depose or assassinate the Tsar were rife. 'Take care, sire! You will end up like your father!' one of his courtiers warned him. As there had been so many palace revolts in the past century, many people assumed that the dissatisfied courtiers would reach for this 'Asiatic remedy', as one diplomat called it. 'I saw this prince enter the cathedral preceded by the assassins of his grandfather, surrounded by those of his father, and followed, no doubt, by his own,' wrote a French émigré after attending Alexander's coronation. Such fears were probably exaggerated, but the possibility could not be discounted.[15]

Matters only got worse when, Britain having failed to make peace with France, Russia had to honour her undertaking and declare war on her. This went against the grain, and revealed the true implications and consequences of the Tilsit settlement. 'Russia's alliance with Your Majesty, and particularly the war with England, has upset the natural manner of thinking in this country,' Napoleon's ambassador reported from St Petersburg in December. 'It is, one could say, a complete change of religion.'[16] Alexander had difficulty in finding ministers whom he could trust to implement his policy. The only one wholeheartedly in favour of the French alliance was Count Nikolai Rumiantsev, who now became Foreign Minister.

It is difficult to know what Alexander really thought of Napoleon and of the arrangement reached at Tilsit, as he was learning to be more secretive and devious. But outwardly he had to pretend that he stood by the treaty and his friendship with the Emperor of the French. Feeling rejected by society, Alexander withdrew into himself, and, as he steeled himself against public opinion, he bandaged his hurt pride and swathed his vulnerable convictions in such spiritual scraps as had been left behind by his strange upbringing.

Ironically, the treaty signed at Tilsit also bore the germ of Napoleon's undoing. On the face of it, he had achieved a great deal. He had broken up the coalition and set up the Grand Duchy of Warsaw as a French marcher outpost, an ambiguous piece on the diplomatic chessboard, to be used aggressively against one or all of his potential enemies, or traded for something. It was a powderkeg laid under one of the bastions of Russia's position in central Europe, as well as a threat to Austria. The treaty had neutered Prussia, and left a strong French military presence in the area ready to intervene at the slightest sign of trouble. Above all, it was an affront to Britain, whose shipping was excluded from even more ports, and who could now find no allies on the European mainland. Napoleon felt the moment draw near when Britain would be obliged to negotiate with him. Shortly after signing the treaty he turned his attention to excluding Britain from the Iberian peninsula, and in November 1807 French troops entered Lisbon.

The crucial element in the Tilsit treaty was that it was meant to embody an alliance, a real *entente*, between the two emperors. Yet Napoleon did not know how to treat allies: he was used to vassals. And this alliance was a particularly unnatural one. It dispelled Russia's primal dream of continued expansion at the expense of Turkey; it placed a question mark over her possession of Poland; and it forced her to penalise herself by making economic war on Britain. Those Russians who did not care about the stain on their country's honour would feel the pinch in their purses. Russia had been pushed into a loveless and unequal marriage with France, and soon adopted the sullen resentment

of the unhappy wife. Sooner or later, she would be unfaithful, and Napoleon would have to go to war again in order to bring her back to heel. And it is much easier to defeat and even dispossess countries than to force them to do one's bidding.

Napoleon had made Russia the cornerstone of his strategy. 'The affairs of the whole world will be decided there … the general peace is to be found in Petersburg,' he said to the special envoy he sent there after Tilsit.[17] For this crucial mission he chose one of his most trusted officers, General Armand de Caulaincourt, Master of the Horse. Caulaincourt was only thirty-four years old, but he had come a long way. The scion of an old noble family of Picardy, he had been brought up partly at the court of Versailles, which made him a little more acceptable to supporters of the *ancien régime*. He knew Russia, as he had already been sent to St Petersburg once by Napoleon, to negotiate with Paul. His brief was to keep the special relationship between Napoleon and Alexander, the 'mood of Tilsit', alive by every possible means.

As Napoleon's ambassador extraordinary, Caulaincourt appeared in public at Alexander's side, sat at his table and enjoyed a position which singled him out from the rest of the diplomatic corps in the Russian capital. He spent lavishly on balls and dinners, and while Russian society avoided him at first, he soon seduced even the most obdurate. In an effort to replicate this situation in the French capital, Napoleon bought his brother-in-law Murat's Paris residence – furniture, silver, bedlinen and all – for an astronomical sum so that Alexander's ambassador, Count Tolstoy, should be comfortable on his arrival.[18] But Tolstoy remained cool, hardly able to conceal his disdain and dislike of Napoleon. His successor, Prince Aleksandr Borisovich Kurakin, a caricature of the boundlessly wealthy and profligate Russian grandee, nicknamed '*le prince diamant*', was hardly more amenable.

Feeling the atmosphere grow cool, Napoleon decided to dangle another bauble before Alexander. In a long letter on 2 February 1808 he laid before him a grandiose plan for a joint attack on the British in India, holding out a prospect of empire in the east. It was an old idea. As early as 1797 General Bonaparte had declared that the surest way to destroy Britain was by throwing her out of India, and when he sailed for Egypt in May 1798 he took with him atlases of Bengal and Hindustan. He wrote to Tippoo Sahib, the Sultan of Mysore, who was then fighting the British, promising to come to his aid.

'I was full of dreams, and I saw the means by which I could carry out all that I had dreamed,' he confided two years later. 'I saw myself founding a religion, marching into Asia, riding an elephant, with a turban on my head and in my hand the new Koran that I would have composed to suit my needs. In my undertakings I would have combined the experiences of the two worlds, exploiting for my own profit the theatre of all history, attacking the power of England in India, and, by means of that conquest, renewing contact with the old Europe. The time I spent in Egypt was the most beautiful of my life, for it was the most ideal.' He felt that the East offered a grander stage on which to act out his destiny. 'There has been nothing left to achieve in Europe over these last two centuries,' he declared a couple of years later. 'It is only in the East that one can work on a grand scale.' Napoleon would far rather have emulated Alexander the Great than Charlemagne.[19]

In 1801 he had sold the idea of a joint march on India to Paul, who had actually begun moving troops towards the Caucasus as a preliminary, and he had touched on it again at Tilsit. Circumstances were now inviting. The ruler of Persia, Shah Fath Ali, whose recent capture of Kabul and Kandahar brought her armies closer to the British outposts in India, greatly admired Napoleon and wanted French arms and officers to modernise his army. He had sent an ambassador, who reached Napoleon's headquarters early in 1807, and in May a treaty of alliance was duly signed. General Gardane was sent to Persia as ambassador with a seventy-man military mission and instructions to survey the routes to India and map out convenient halting points. He came up with a route through Baghdad, Herat, Kabul and Peshawar.[20]

'If an army of 50,000 men, Russian, French, and perhaps even partly Austrian were to set off from Constantinople into Asia it would need to get no further than the Euphrates to make England tremble and fall at the feet of the continent,' Napoleon wrote to Alexander on 2 February 1808. Caulaincourt noticed the Tsar's expression change and grow animated as he read the letter. 'This is the language of Tilsit,' Alexander exclaimed. He thrilled at the grandeur of the concept and seemed keen to participate.[21] But there would be no talk of the East at their next meeting, a few months later, as in the short term Napoleon needed his ally for another purpose.

A revolt had broken out against French rule in Madrid on 2 May 1808, and although this had been crushed with severity, insurrection had spread through the whole of Spain. A blow was dealt to French military prestige on 21 July when a force of some 20,000 men under General Dupont was cut off by a Spanish army and obliged to capitulate at Bailén. Exactly a month later, General Junot was defeated by the British at Vimiero in Portugal. Napoleon concluded that he must go to Spain and conduct operations in person. But he suspected that the moment he was fully engaged on the other side of the Pyrenees Austria would take the opportunity to make war on him. He therefore needed to make sure that his Russian ally was going to cover his back.

The two emperors agreed to meet at Erfürt in Thuringia. They arrived in the city on 27 September 1808 and spent the next two weeks in each other's company. Alexander was treated to the spectacle of Napoleon as the master of Europe, surrounded by the kings of Westphalia, Württemberg, Bavaria and Saxony, the Duke of Weimar and a dozen other sovereign princes, all doing obeisance. He sat through bombastic performances of classics by Corneille, Racine and Voltaire performed by the best actors of Paris, brought along specially for the purpose. Among them were some of the most celebrated beauties, whom Napoleon apparently tried to introduce into Alexander's bed. Napoleon had his troops parade before the Tsar, spent hours talking to him about administrative reforms, new buildings, the arts, and all the things he knew interested him. He took him off to visit the battlefield of Jena, and on the knoll from which he had commanded the action he gave a dramatic account of the battle. After this they sat down to a bivouac dinner, as though they were on campaign. Outwardly, Alexander appeared to be duly impressed. When the line 'The friendship of a great man is a gift of the gods' rang out during the performance of Voltaire's *Oedipe* one evening, Alexander rose from his seat and ostentatiously took Napoleon's hand, while the whole audience applauded.[22] But it was all sham.

When Alexander had announced his intention of going to Erfürt, most of his entourage begged him not to go, knowing only too well his weakness and fearing that he would be forced into some new agreement. There was also a latent fear that he might never come back: only a few months earlier, Napoleon had invited the Spanish King Charles IV and his son to a meeting at Bayonne, and had promptly deposed and imprisoned them. The underlying fears are best expressed in a long letter the Tsar's mother wrote to him just as he was setting off. In measured tones that nevertheless betray a sense of despair, she implored him not to go, saying that his attendance on Napoleon would insult the dignity of every Russian and lose him their confidence. 'Alexander, the throne is but poorly secured when it is not based on that strong sentiment,' she wrote. 'Do not wound your people in all that they hold most sacred and dear in your august person; recognise their love in their present anxiety and do not go voluntarily to bow your forehead adorned with the most beautiful diadem before the idol of fortune, an idol accursed of present and future humanity; step back from the edge of the precipice!' Again and again she came back to her real fear. 'Alexander, in the name of God avoid your downfall; the esteem of a people is easily lost but not so easily regained; you will lose it through this meeting, and you will lose your empire and destroy your family …'

Alexander's reply was calm, well reasoned and Machiavellian in its clear-sightedness. He poured cold water on the enthusiasm aroused by Bailén and Vimiero, pointing out that they were of no significance, and that Napoleon was strong enough to conquer Spain and beat Russia, even if Austria were to come to her aid. The only course of action was to work at mobilising the power of Russia and wait patiently for the moment when that power, along with that of Austria, could be brought

to bear in a decisive way. 'But it is only in the most profound silence that we must work towards this aim, not by boasting of our armaments and preparations in public, or in loudly denouncing him whom we wish to defy,' he explained. He pointed out that France would always prefer alliance with Russia to a state of conflict, and this meant that Napoleon would not harm him and would not move against Russia if she did not provoke him. He was afraid Austria might be tempted into going to war too soon, thereby sealing her own downfall and putting back for years the moment at which they could stand up to Napoleon effectively. He believed that by going to Erfürt and appearing to be ready to support France against her, he might make Austria think twice before launching an attack that was doomed to failure. 'If the meeting were to have no other result than that of preventing such a deplorable calamity, it would compensate with interest for all the unpleasantness involved in it,' he concluded. To his sister Catherine, he replied more succinctly. 'Napoleon thinks that I'm just a fool,' he wrote, 'but he who laughs last laughs longest.'[23]

Napoleon could have had no inkling of these thoughts, but he was unpleasantly struck by the change that had taken place in Alexander. He found him more self-possessed and annoyingly steadfast, and their interviews were nothing like those of Tilsit – so much so that one day Napoleon grew so heated in the discussion that he tore his hat from his head, threw it on the floor and stamped on it.[24]

Alexander had come to Erfürt looking for some advantage or concession with which he could justify his apparent subjection to Napoleon to sceptics at home. But Napoleon was not in a giving mood. He deflected Alexander's plans for expansion in the direction of Constantinople, as he had come to the conclusion that any division of the Ottoman Empire would benefit Russia far more than France. He allowed Alexander to hang on to Moldavia and Wallachia, and to take Finland from Sweden. He agreed to withdraw French troops from the Grand Duchy of Warsaw and to start evacuating his garrisons in Prussia. But that was the sum total of his concessions. Alexander did not openly challenge the basis of the alliance, and agreed to act out the role of faithful ally with respect to the Austrian threat. 'The two emperors parted relatively satisfied with their arrangements, but, at bottom, dissatisfied with each other,' in the words of Caulaincourt.[25]

Having, as he thought, secured a degree of support from Alexander, Napoleon turned his attention to Spain, where he went in November. On 4 December he was in Madrid, and from there he set about pacifying the country. Just as he had anticipated, Austria seized the opportunity of his back being turned, and in April 1809 invaded the territory of his Bavarian and Saxon allies.

Napoleon recrossed the Pyrenees and marched to their defence. On 21 May he confronted the Austrian army at Essling. The battle was little short of a defeat for Napoleon, dimming the aura of invincibility that hung about him and giving heart to all his enemies. On 6 July he won the decisive battle of Wagram and dictated a treaty with Austria. But he was far from satisfied. Alexander, on whose assistance he had called as soon as he heard of the Austrian attack, had been slow to respond, and his army had taken an eternity to reach the theatre of operations. When it did so, it began executing a series of military minuets aimed at avoiding the Austrian forces until all was over. It was so successful that it suffered just one casualty during the entire campaign.

Napoleon had taken Alexander for granted, and was now paying the price. He would henceforth have to make more of an effort to bring his ally back on side, and he began to consider what concessions he might make to him. But he had no idea of how far Alexander had strayed from his influence. He certainly did not know that his own Foreign Minister, Talleyrand, had been involved in secret talks with the Tsar at Erfürt. 'It is up to you to save Europe and you will only achieve this by standing up to Napoleon,' Talleyrand claimed to have told Alexander. What Talleyrand probably did not know was that the Tsar had already come to see himself as being locked in a personal contest with Napoleon. Instead of acquiring a useful ally, Napoleon had helped to create a formidable rival, one who was already working at supplanting rather than merely defeating him. 'There is no room for

the two of us in Europe,' Alexander had written to his sister Catherine before setting off for Erfürt; 'sooner or later, one of us will have to bow out.'[26]

3
The Soul of Europe

That Alexander could be beginning to think of himself as a counterweight or even an alternative to Napoleon on the international stage is eloquent testimony to what a mess the Emperor of the French had made of his dealings with the other nations of Europe, and with the Germans in particular.

France's had long been the dominant intellectual and cultural influence on the Continent, and by the end of the eighteenth century progressives and liberals of every nation fed on the fruits of her Enlightenment. The fall of the Bastille on 14 July 1789, followed by the abolition of privilege, the declaration of the Rights of Man, the introduction of representative government and other such measures elicited wild enthusiasm among the educated classes in every corner of Europe. Even moderate liberals saw revolutionary France as the catalyst that would bring about the transformation of the old world into a more equitable, and therefore more civilised and peaceful one.

The horrors of the revolution put many off, and others were offended by France's high-handed behaviour with regard to areas, such as Holland and Switzerland, caught up in her military struggle against the coalitions lined up against her. But the French were convinced that they were engaged on a mission of progress, bringing happiness to other nations. So, in a more pragmatic way, was Napoleon, who used to say that 'What is good for the French is good for everyone.' Liberals everywhere clung to the view that a process of transformation and human regeneration was under way, and that casualties were only to be expected. Those suffering foreign or aristocratic oppression continued to look longingly at the example set by France. With some justification.

The political boundaries criss-crossing much of Europe at the end of the eighteenth century and the constitutional arrangements within them were largely the legacy of medieval attempts at creating a pan-European empire. Germany was broken up into more than three hundred different political units, ruled over by electors, archbishops, abbots, dukes, landgraves, margraves, city councils, counts and imperial knights. What is now Belgium belonged to the Habsburgs and was ruled from Vienna; Italy was divided up into eleven states, most of them ruled by Austrian Habsburgs or French and Spanish Bourbons; the Holy Roman Empire of the German Nation included Czechs, Magyars and half a dozen other nationalities; and Poland was cut up into three and ruled from Berlin, Vienna and St Petersburg.

Every time a French army passed through one of these areas, it disturbed a venerable clutter of archaic law and regulation, of privilege and prerogative, of rights and duties, releasing or awakening a variety of pent-up or dormant aspirations in the process. And every time France annexed a territory she reorganised it along the lines of French Enlightenment thought. Rulers were dethroned, ecclesiastical institutions were abrogated, ghettos were opened, guild rights, caste privileges and other restrictions were abolished, and serfs and slaves were freed. Although this was often accompanied by cynical exploitation of the territory in the French cause and shameless looting, the net effect was nevertheless a positive one in the liberal view. As a result, significant sections, and in some cases the majority, of the politically aware populations of such countries as Belgium, the Netherlands, Switzerland, Italy, Poland and even Spain ranged themselves in the camp of France against those seeking to restore the *ancien régime*, even if they resented French rule and decried the depredations of French troops. Nowhere more so than in Germany.

The Holy Roman Empire, founded by Charlemagne a thousand years before, included almost all the lands inhabited by German-speaking people, but it did not bring them together or represent them. The absurd division of the territory into hundreds of political units inhibited cultural and economic, as well as political life. German eighteenth-century thought was cosmopolitan rather than nationalist, but most educated Germans nonetheless longed for a more coherent homeland.

Between 1801 and 1806, following his victories over Austria and Prussia, Napoleon thoroughly transformed the political, social and economic climate throughout the German lands. He secularised ecclesiastical states and abolished the status of imperial cities, swept away anachronistic institutions and residues of gothic rights, in effect dismantling the Empire and emancipating large sections of the population in the process. In 1806, after his defeat of the Emperor Francis at Ulm and Austerlitz, he forced him to abdicate and to dissolve the Holy Roman Empire itself. In a process known as 'mediatisation', hundreds of tiny sovereignties were swept away as imperial counts and knights lost their lands, which were fused into thirty-six states of varying size, bound together in the Confederation of the Rhine. With them went all the nonsensical borders and petty restrictions that had made life so difficult. In their place came institutions moulded on the French pattern.

The ending of feudal practices gave agriculture a boost, the abolition of guild and other restrictions encouraged industry and trade, the removal of tolls and frontiers liberated trade. The confiscation of Church property was followed by the building of schools and the development of universities. Not surprisingly, all this made Napoleon popular with the middle classes, with small traders, peasants, artisans and Jews, as well as with progressive intellectuals, students and writers. Johan Wilhelm Gleim, a poet more used to singing the glories of Frederick the Great, wrote an ode to Napoleon, Friedrich Hölderlin also immortalised him in verse, and Beethoven dedicated his 'Eroica' symphony to him.

Although many were put off by his decision to take the imperial crown and some even felt betrayed by the act, German intellectuals continued to be fascinated by Napoleon, whom they saw as a figure in the mould of Alexander the Great. Some hoped he would revive the old German empire like a latter-day Charlemagne. To others, he appeared as some kind of avatar. The young Heinrich Heine imagined Christ riding into Jerusalem on Palm Sunday as he watched Napoleon making his entry into his native Düsseldorf. Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel famously identified him as 'the world-spirit on horseback'.

But that moment, just after the victories of Jena and Auerstädt, in which Napoleon destroyed the Prussian army and shook the Prussian state to its core, was to be something of a turning point. The Prussians were shocked and insulted by the French victories, but they also saw them as proof of the superiority of France and her political culture. When Napoleon rode into Berlin he was greeted by crowds which, according to one French officer, were as enthusiastic as those that had welcomed him in Paris on his triumphant return from Austerlitz the previous year. 'An undefinable feeling, a mixture of pain, admiration and curiosity agitated the crowds which pressed forward as he passed,' in the words of one eyewitness.[1] Napoleon won the hearts of the Berliners as well as their admiration over the next weeks.

But he treated Prussia and her King worse than he had treated any conquered country before. At Tilsit he publicly humiliated Frederick William by refusing to negotiate with him, and by treating Queen Louise, who had come in person to plead her country's cause, with insulting gallantry. He did not bother to negotiate, merely summoning the Prussian Minister Count Goltz to let him know his intentions. He told the Minister that he had thought of giving the throne of Prussia to his own brother Jérôme, but out of regard for Tsar Alexander, who had begged him to spare Frederick William, he had graciously decided to leave him in possession of it. But he diminished his realm by taking away most of the territory seized by Prussia from Poland, so that the number of his subjects, which had grown to 9,744,000, was reduced to 4,938,000. Napoleon would brook no discussion, and Frederick William had to submit.[2]

Having done so, he wrote to the Emperor on 3 August 1807 entreating him to accept Prussia as an ally of France, addressing him as 'the greatest man of our century'. Napoleon ignored the request. The reason he did not wish to encumber himself with such an ally was that he intended to despoil the country. In the treaty he had foisted on Prussia, he had undertaken to evacuate his troops, but only after all the indemnities agreed upon had been paid. But the level of the indemnities was never

agreed, and while vast amounts of money did pour out of the Prussian treasury into French coffers, some 150,000 French troops continued to live off the land, happily helping themselves to everything they required. French military authorities virtually supervised the administration, while the economy plummeted. The Prussian army had been reduced to 42,000 men, with the result that hundreds of thousands of disbanded soldiers and even officers wandered the land begging for their subsistence.[3]

Napoleon did consider abolishing Prussia altogether. The kingdom had only emerged as a major power sixty years before (as a result of a French defeat), but it was efficient and expansive, and might one day rally the rest of Germany, which was something he wanted to avoid at all costs. But while he continued to exploit and humiliate it in every way, he did not get around to dismantling it. In effect, Napoleon's treatment of Prussia is paradigmatic of his whole mishandling of the German issue, for which his successors were still paying in 1940.

If Frederick William had every reason to feel aggrieved, most of the other rulers in Germany, grouped in the Confederation of the Rhine, had much to thank Napoleon for. For one thing, they were relieved to be rid of the heavy-handed Habsburg overlordship. Although they were now subjected to Napoleon through a series of alliances, they had grown in power within their own realms. Several had even been promoted, and most had gained in territory, becoming proper sovereigns with their own armies.

Landgrave Ludwig of Hesse-Darmstädt had seen the size of his fief swell, and became a grand duke; the tiny Landgravate of Baden had also become a grand duchy, and its ruler Frederick Charles willingly married his grandson to Napoleon's stepdaughter Stephanie de Beauharnais. The Elector of Saxony had seen his realm expand and turn into a kingdom. Bavaria too was enlarged and turned into a kingdom, and in 1809 King Maximillian I acquired more territory, making his realm larger than Prussia. Württemberg, which had been a mere duchy, was extended with every Napoleonic victory and its elector Frederick was promoted to the rank of king in 1806. He was only too happy to see his daughter marry Napoleon's brother Jérôme.

Jérôme himself ruled over the Kingdom of Westphalia, created by Napoleon at the heart of Charlemagne's Germany with its capital at Cassel, extended again in 1810 to include Hanover, Bremen and part of the North Sea coast. 'What the people of Germany desire impatiently is that individuals who are not noble but have talents should have an equal right to your consideration and to employment, that all kinds of servitude and all intermediary links between the sovereign and the lowest class of the people should be entirely abolished,' Napoleon wrote to Jérôme as he took up the throne of Westphalia. 'The benefits of the *Code Napoléon*, transparency of procedures and the jury system will be the distinguishing characteristics of your monarchy. And if I have to be quite open with you, I count more on their effect for the extension and consolidation of your monarchy than on the greatest victories. Your people must enjoy a liberty and equality and a well-being unknown to the other peoples of Germany,' he continued, making it clear that the security of his throne and that of France were better served by this great benefit she was able to bestow than by any number of armies or fortresses.[4]

Some of the other rulers did follow the French example and adopted the *Code Napoléon*. King Maximillian of Bavaria even brought in a constitution. Most of them, however, only introduced those French laws which gave them greater power over their subjects, sweeping away in the process venerable institutions and hard-won privileges. But whether they were enlightened liberals or authoritarian despots like the King of Württemberg, their subjects were immeasurably better off in every way than they had been before they had heard of Bonaparte.

Causes for discontent nevertheless began to pile up. The most vociferous opponents of the new arrangements were, unsurprisingly, the horde of imperial counts and knights who had lost their estates and privileges. More liberal elements were disappointed that the changes wrought by Napoleon had not gone far enough. The old free cities and some of the bishoprics, which had been havens of German patriotism, had been awarded to one or other of the rulers Napoleon had favoured. Along with their

independence they lost some of their freedoms. Many were disappointed that the old aristocratic oligarchy had not been replaced by republics, and some would have liked to see the creation of one great German state.

The high-handedness of the arrangements, with Napoleon callously shunting provinces from one state to another, could not fail to offend Germans at every level. French became the official language in some areas. French officials were placed in key posts, and the higher ranks in the armies of the various sovereigns were reserved for Frenchmen. The large-scale official looting was also highly offensive. French military impositions and the Continental System, which actually had the effect of stimulating the coalmining and steel industries in Germany, became a cause for everyday grumbling by the very classes that naturally supported the changes brought in by Napoleon.

Cultural factors also played a part. Cosmopolitan and outward-looking as the Germans were, they were generally, whether they were Catholics or Protestants, very pious, and they found the godlessness of revolutionary and Napoleonic France shocking. In Lutheran circles, the ribbon of the Légion d'Honneur was even referred to as 'the sign of the Beast'. Napoleon was more popular amongst Catholic Germans, until June 1809, when he dispossessed the Pope and imprisoned him in Savona, drawing upon his head the Pontiff's excommunication. The Germans also nurtured an age-old sense of their 'otherness', a vision of themselves as 'true' and 'pure' in contrast to the French, whom they viewed as essentially flighty and artificial, if not actually false and corrupt.[5]

It was not long before these feelings began to have practical consequences. Her catastrophic defeat in 1806 had prompted Prussia to embark on a far-ranging programme of reform and modernisation. Those in charge of carrying it out realised that a real revolution was required, both in the army, where the soldier was transformed from a conscript motivated entirely by ferocious eighteenth-century discipline into a professional inspired by love of his country, and in society as a whole, where an edict passed in 1807 swept away the remnants of feudalism and emancipated the peasantry.

This was to be a revolution from above, carried out, in the words of Frederick William's Minister Count Karl August von Hardenberg, 'through the wisdom of those in authority' rather than by popular impulse. It was also to be a spiritual revolution. One of its chief architects, Baron vom Stein, a mediatised knight, wanted 'to reawaken collective spirit, civic sense, devotion to the country, the feeling of national honour and independence, so that a vivifying and creative spirit would replace the petty formalism of a mechanical apparatus'.[6]

The process was largely carried out by German nationalists from other parts of the country. Baron vom Stein was from Nassau, Count Hardenberg was from Hanover, as was General Gerhard Johann Scharnhorst; Gebhart Blücher was from Mecklemburg, August Gneisenau was a Saxon. They were inspired by the example of revolutionary France in their determination to infuse a national spirit into every part of the army and administration. But their reforms aimed not so much at emancipating people as at turning them into efficient and enthusiastic servants of the state. Many of them believed that only a strong Prussia would be able to liberate and unite the German lands, and then go on to challenge French cultural and political primacy. A powerful tool in this was to be education, and Wilhelm von Humboldt was put in charge of a programme of reform of the system that culminated in the opening of a university in Berlin in 1810.

At a popular level, the urge to seek regeneration through purification manifested itself through the formation of the *Tugendbund*, or League of Virtue, by a group of young officers in Berlin. Its aims were non-political in principle, consisting of self-perfection through education and moral elevation, but since this included the fostering of national consciousness and the encouragement of love of the fatherland, they were deeply so in practice. The membership never exceeded a few hundred, and all they did was sit around talking of insurrection, guerrilla war and revenge. But it is in the very nature of secret societies to appear more powerful and threatening than they actually are, and the *Tugendbund* had profound symbolic significance.

It also acted as an inspiration and a focus to disaffected elements in other parts of Germany. The German nation's impotence in the face of the arrogance of the French was underlined as the cost of the Continental System made itself felt. Wounded pride turned into grim determination in the minds of many German patriots, and it received its first encouragement with the news of Bailén in the summer of 1808. 'The events in Spain have had a great effect and show what can be done by a nation which has force and courage,' Stein wrote to a friend.[7]

Napoleon was well aware of the new spirit at work in Germany. He was not particularly concerned by it, but he did, during his stay in Erfürt and Weimar at the time of the meeting with Alexander in 1808, make a desultory effort to garner some popularity, inviting professors from the university of Jena to lunch with him. He decorated Goethe with the Légion d'Honneur. He had the poet Christoph Martin Wieland brought to Weimar, and spent upwards of two hours discussing German literature with him during a ball, while a circle of astonished guests looked on. He then walked over to Goethe and engaged him in conversation. The event was commented on in the court bulletin, which explained that 'the hero of the age thereby gave proof of his attachment to the nation of which he is the protector, and that he esteems its language and literature, which are its national binding force'. But the next day he visited the battlefield of Jena, on which he had made the Germans build a small temple to commemorate his triumph over them.[8]

In 1802, the German philosopher Friedrich Schlegel had gone to Paris with the intention of founding an international institute of learning in this new Rome. Now he was looking more to Germany. Goethe, who wore his Légion d'Honneur with pride and used to refer to Napoleon as 'my Emperor', was also beginning to complain of the shameful state of submission into which Germany had been forced. The philosopher Johann Gottlieb Fichte, the writer Ernst Moritz Arndt and the theologian Friedrich Daniel Schleiermacher were among those who called for a national German revival and a rejection of the French hegemony. Many of those who had seen Napoleon as a liberator now saw in him nothing but an oppressor.

There had been a predictable surge of national feeling in Austria following her defeat by Napoleon in 1806, with papers and pamphlets calling for a united German front against the French. Austria's natural desire to avenge the humiliating defeat and regain some of her losses had been powerfully reinforced by the many disgruntled mediatised counts and knights, the deposed north Italian and particularly Piedmontese nobles and the many German patriots from the Confederation of the Rhine who had taken refuge and in many cases service there. In January 1808 the Emperor Francis married for a third time. His bride, Maria Ludovica of Habsburg, was the daughter of the Captain-General of Lombardy, who had been thrown out by Napoleon, and this was not the least of her reasons for loathing the French.

The new government under Count Philip Stadion appointed by Francis in 1808 began preparing for a confrontation with France, instituting, amongst other things, a national militia, the *Landwehr*. This war of revenge, Stadion made clear, was to be a national, German one, aimed at expelling France and her influence from central Europe altogether. While Maria Ludovica and a poet and fitness enthusiast called Caroline Pichler reinvented a supposedly traditional German form of dress, the *Tracht*, the historian Johannes von Müller, the publicist Friedrich von Gentz and others underpinned the anti-French arguments with facts. They made much of what they saw as the struggle of the Spanish people against foreign domination, holding it up as an example for the Germans to follow. Authors of every kind were invited to police headquarters, where they would be asked to use their pens in the national cause, and publishers of periodicals were instructed to print patriotic poems and articles, on pain of having their publications closed down. Unbidden, the poet and dramatist Heinrich von Kleist published '*Die Hermannschlacht*', a poetic appeal to Germans and Austrians alike to rise up against the French and to punish all pro-Napoleonic 'traitors'.[9]

In April 1809, judging Napoleon to be bogged down in Spain, Austria invaded Bavaria and launched a war for the 'liberation' of Germany. 'We fight to assert the independence of the Austrian monarchy, to restore to Germany the independence and national honour that belong to her,' declared Stadion in his manifesto. The commander-in-chief Archduke Charles issued a proclamation penned by Friedrich Schlegel which dwelt on the pan-German character of the war, representing it as an opportunity for the redemption and regeneration of the nation.[10]

Their call did not go unanswered. A Prussian officer, Frederick Charles de Katt, attempted to seize Magdeburg with a gang of partisans, but failed and was forced to take refuge in Austrian Bohemia. Colonel Dornberg, a Hessian serving in King Jérôme's royal guard who had been plotting with Stein, Gneisenau and Scharnhorst, intended to seize Jérôme and call the population to arms. In the event, he only managed to raise six to eight hundred men and was easily defeated. This was bad news for Major Schill, a Prussian officer who had distinguished himself in 1806–1807 by his determined defence of Kolberg. On 28 April 1809 he marched out of Berlin with his regiment, telling his men that he was going to invade Westphalia and evict the French from Germany. He was expecting to link up with Dornberg, who should by then have seized Jérôme, but he soon found himself facing superior forces and was obliged to retreat to the Baltic coast, where he hung on, vainly hoping for British seaborne support, until he was killed in a skirmish on 31 May.

An altogether more serious response came in the Tyrol, where resentment of the French ran much deeper. The area had traditionally been governed by the Habsburgs with much respect for local tradition and idiosyncrasies, but Bavaria, to which it was transferred by Napoleon in 1806, operated a more centralised administration. The locals were offended by higher rates of taxation and by enforced conscription. The parish clergy did not approve of the secularisation taking place in Bavaria, adding to the discontent. In January 1809 Andreas Hofer and a handful of other Tyrolese went to Vienna to prepare an insurrection to coincide with Austria's invasion of Bavaria. On 9 April beacons were duly lit and the Tyrol rebelled. A Bavarian corps of two thousand men was forced to capitulate, and Austrian forces occupied Innsbrück. But they were soon ejected from it by the French under Marshal Lefèbvre.

On 21–22 May Napoleon fought the twin battles of Aspern-Essling against the Austrians under Archduke Charles. Although technically a French victory, they reverberated through Europe as a defeat. Napoleon suffered a personal loss in the death of Marshal Lannes, and had to bring Lefèbvre back to join the main army. This allowed the revolt in the Tyrol to erupt with renewed vigour, under the slogan 'God and the Emperor', which had enemies of Napoleon all over Europe rubbing their hands at what they thought was a new Spain.

At this point, the Duke of Brunswick-Oels appeared on the scene. His father had been ignominiously defeated at Auerstädt in 1806, and he had vowed eternal hatred to the French. He had gone to Vienna, where he obtained a subsidy in order to raise a 20,000-strong 'Legion of Vengeance' with which he intended to liberate northern Germany. He now sallied forth, defeated the Saxons at Zittau, seized Dresden on 11 June and Leipzig ten days after that. On 21 July he marched on, through Brunswick and Hanover, but he met with little enthusiasm, and was eventually forced to take refuge on a British man-of-war in the Baltic.

In the meantime, Napoleon had won the conclusive battle of Wagram, and Austria was forced to sign the Treaty of Vienna, which reduced it to a state of powerlessness. Her image as a potential liberator of Germany was shattered, and she settled down meekly within the Napoleonic system. Francis was only too happy to pay tribute by giving his favourite daughter to the Corsican ogre, and the marriage was hailed as a happy event by his people.

Austria's failure stemmed in large measure from her inability to engage the support of Russia, and above all to draw Prussia into the war against the French. The pan-German plotters had been active in this respect, and Vienna had been in close touch with Stein, Hardenberg, Scharnhorst and the other Prussian reformers, who were doing everything to bounce Frederick William into declaring

war. But the pusillanimous Prussian King was afraid. He was afraid of the French, and he was afraid of starting a 'national' war that might end up by costing him his own throne. It was only when, with Schill marching into Westphalia and popular opinion at a high pitch of excitement, he thought he might lose his throne if did not act that he considered going to war.

One of the stipulations of the Treaty of Vienna was that Francis had to banish all French émigrés, Piedmontese, and Germans from other states who had settled or taken service in Austria. A number, including Karl von Grolmann, a Prussian officer who had come to fight for Austria, now headed for Spain, where they could carry on their crusade against Napoleonic France. Many more took the St Petersburg road, already trodden by some of those German patriots who had gone to Prussia in the hope that she might become the champion of Germany. With both Prussia and Austria discredited, Alexander was beginning to look like the only alternative. He was still an ally of Napoleon, and had acted as such by sending an army to threaten Austria during the recent war. But he had done only the minimum demanded of him. Assisted by large doses of wishful thinking, many of those opposed to Napoleon and French hegemony had begun to see in Alexander a tutelary angel of their own particular cause.

One of the first to fall for Alexander, when she had met him in 1805, was Frederick William's Queen, Louise, who saw him as 'a Schiller hero come down to earth'. 'In you, perfection is incarnate,' she wrote to him; 'one must know you to know perfection.' The feeling did not go unrequited, which was probably what had saved Prussia from extinction at Tilsit. But there was little more that Alexander could do for her and her dismal husband. In January 1809 he invited them to St Petersburg, where he honoured and fêted them, thereby sending out a strong signal to all Napoleon's enemies in Europe. The mutual esteem between Alexander and Louise grew. When he heard of her death in Prussia in July 1810, he saw her as a victim of Napoleon's barbaric oppression and reacted with requisite chivalry. 'I swear to you that I shall avenge her death and shall make certain that her murderer pays for his crime,' he is alleged to have said to the Prussian Minister in St Petersburg.[11]

Alexander was also viewed as a potential saviour by other humiliated or dispossessed monarchs and nobles, including the kings of France, Sardinia, the Two Sicilies, Spain, the Grand Master of the Order of Malta, a gaggle of dispossessed Germans, as well as hordes of French, Piedmontese, Spanish and other émigrés.

This did not prevent elements more or less violently opposed to the *ancien régime* from looking to him as well. Many of the Germans who placed their hopes in Alexander were republican or at least liberal nationalists in conflict with the Prussian monarchy. The same went for *Tugendbunders* and even the Freemasons, who were regarded by Frederick William as dangerous subversives. Among the Spaniards and Italians who placed their hopes in the Tsar were liberals who would in time be clamped in irons by their own monarchs.

Other unlikely members of the club were French liberal opponents of Napoleon, such as Benjamin Constant and Madame de Staël, who, while subscribing to most of the achievements of the French Revolution, hated him for his despotic tendencies and for the cultural arrogance with which he treated Europe. Her bestselling novel *Corinne*, published in 1807, was a thinly veiled criticism of French doings in Italy, while her treatise on German literature, *De l'Allemagne*, was so implicitly critical that the first printing was confiscated on Napoleon's orders.

His behaviour and his policies were rapidly losing Napoleon the dominion over hearts and minds he had enjoyed in earlier years, while a great *internationale* of alienated people all over Europe was gathering, bound together only by their detestation of him. Even Wellington was beginning to see and to portray his war against Napoleon in Spain as a part of some kind of moral crusade.[12]

None of this was of any immediate consequence, and Napoleon's position in Europe was still paramount. He controlled his vast imperium through a web of loyalty, beginning with his crowned brothers. He had created all over Europe a new international aristocracy beholden to him, endowed with fiefs which had fallen vacant through the mediatisation of the Holy Roman Empire or through

conquest, and by 1812 the imperial almanac listed four princes, thirty dukes, nearly four hundred counts and over a thousand barons, not including the titles Napoleon had given to members of his own family.

It is also worth noting that he had many natural allies bound to him by self-interest of one sort or another. Frederick William and Hardenberg feared the social upheaval that might result from any national revival more than they resented Napoleon. Others in Germany and Europe as a whole feared the relentless onward march of Russian expansion and believed that a weakening of French influence would entail Russian hegemony, and distrusted Alexander's motives.[13]

Napoleon's spies nevertheless kept a close watch on potential subversives all over Germany and on the support they were receiving from Russia. By the summer of 1810 he was growing irritated by the numbers of Russians visiting European courts and capitals trying to incite people against France. In Vienna, the former ambassador Count Razumovsky, the *salonière* Princess Bagration and Napoleon's old Corsican enemy Pozzo di Borgo, now in Russian uniform, made up a real propaganda network between them. Others were rallying anti-Napoleonic sentiment in the watering places of Germany. He asked Alexander to recall them all to Russia, but received scant satisfaction.

In November 1810 Talleyrand's successor as Foreign Minister, Jean-Baptiste de Champagny, reported to Napoleon that 'a vast revolution' was brewing in Germany, fuelled by national hatred of France. This gathered in strength as tension between France and Russia mounted, and as the Continental System began to bite. Although he tended to make light of the threat, Napoleon was beginning to take more serious note of it, and declared his intention of 'uprooting the German national spirit'. And the only way he would be able to 'uproot' this burgeoning growth was by cutting off its chief source of nourishment, which came from Russia.[14]

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.