

NAPOLEON BONAPARTE (1769–1821)

Famous Men of Modern Times by John H. Haaren

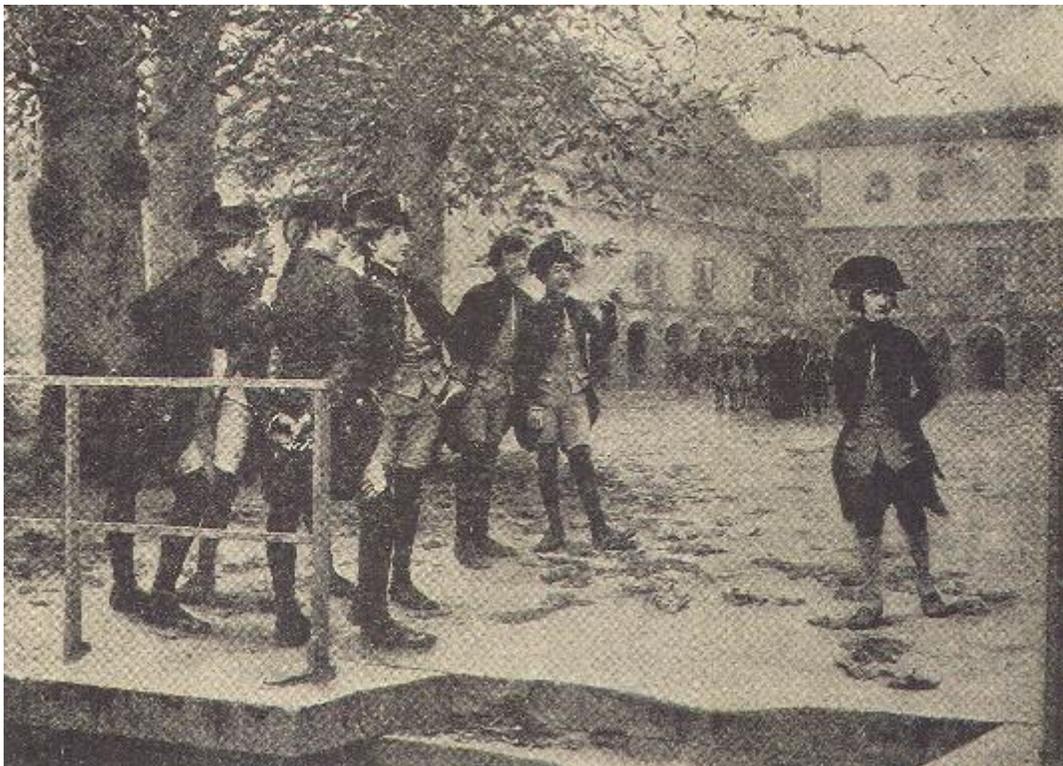
THE home of Napoleon Bonaparte for the first ten years of his life was at Ajaccio (a yat' cho) on the island of Corsica. When ten years of age he was sent to a military school. At sixteen he entered the army.

When France was declared a republic he sided with the revolutionists. Some of the people of Paris did not like the idea of a republic, and about forty thousand of them marched through the streets to attack the Tuileries where the republican Convention was sitting.

The Convention had learned that an attack was to be made on them, and they had prepared to resist it. They had troops; but they needed a commander.

One of the members who knew Napoleon said, "I know just the man you want. He is a little Corsican officer and will not stand upon ceremony."

Napoleon was sent for and put in command. He led out their forces and many of the royalists were killed or wounded, and the rest fled. He [287] had done his work well, and the Convention at once gave him a higher position.



NAPOLEON AT SCHOOL IN BRIENNE.

A French army, sent to attack the Austrians in North Italy was placed under his command. The soldiers were greatly dissatisfied because their pay was in arrears. Napoleon said to them, "I will lead you into the most fertile fields that the sun shines on. Rich provinces and great cities shall be your reward."

The Austrians posted themselves near a town called Lodi, on the bank of the River Adda. A bridge crossed the Adda into the town, and [288] this bridge was first taken. Then Napoleon and General Lannes made a splendid charge and captured the town itself.

Four days later Napoleon entered Milan, and compelled that wealthy city to pay him nearly four million dollars. Mantua was also captured and the palaces of the dukes and nobles were plundered.

When peace was made Austria was obliged to surrender Belgium, Corfu and the Ionian Islands, and to liberate General Lafayette and other Frenchmen held in Austrian prisons.

With French aid, republics were established in Switzerland, Naples, and Rome; and Napoleon then said: "If my voice has any influence England shall never have one hour's truce until she is destroyed."

But his next campaign was in Egypt, where he was again victorious. The English commander, Nelson, however, destroyed the ships in which the French soldiers were expecting to return; and so Napoleon, leaving fifteen thousand troops to hold possession of Egypt, marched the remainder of his army into Palestine.

He was successful in an attack on Jaffa. Then he proceeded northward to Acre, which was garrisoned by the Turks. After besieging this [289] town for more than sixty days, he was compelled to withdraw.

Napoleon then returned to Egypt and found a great Turkish army just about to attack the troops he had left there; but he conquered them in a single battle and once more hastened back to France, where he was warmly welcomed by the people, and was the idol of the army.



NAPOLEON IN EGYPT

At that time France was governed by five men who were called "The Directory," or ruling body of France. There was also a "Council of Five Hundred," something like our House of Representatives.

The Directory resigned; and since many of the Council of Five Hundred disliked him, Napoleon had them turned out of office.

Napoleon and two associates were then made rulers of France, under the title of Consuls; and, although he was known as the "First Consul," he was the real governor of the French nation.

One of the first things Napoleon did after being made First Consul, was to write a letter to George III, king of England, proposing that England and France should make peace. The English government replied that the easiest thing for France to do, if she desired peace with the other [291] powers of Europe, would be to restore the royal family to the throne.

Napoleon then made his famous attack on Italy, which had been lost to France while he was in Egypt.

Sixty thousand men were ordered to cross the Alps. They were to go by four different passes and then to meet in Italy. Cannon had to be dragged over the snow; and sometimes a hundred men were required to handle a single large gun.

They passed the Monastery of St. Bernard and descended into Italy. A desperate battle was fought at Marengo; and, after a partial defeat, the French were again victorious.

The conqueror returned home in triumph, but his enemies attempted to assassinate him by exploding a barrel of gunpowder under his carriage. The carriage, however, had got safely past before the explosion took place.

This incident led to giving him still greater power, and Napoleon was from that time considered as the emperor of the French.

In 1801, the very next year after the victory at Marengo, British troops landed in Egypt, and in one short campaign drove the French out of that country.

[292] When Napoleon heard that Egypt was lost, he said, "Well! There remains only the descent on Britain;" and in a short time one hundred and sixty thousand men were ready to invade England.

An immense number of flat-bottomed boats were prepared to carry this force across the channel. But Lord Nelson was guarding the English coasts by day and by night. Napoleon knew that Nelson's guns would soon sink his boats; and so a treaty of peace was made in 1802, and the struggle with England was again postponed.

Napoleon was as great a tyrant as Louis XVI; and he tried to be as tyrannical in foreign countries as he was at home. The people of northern Italy were so alarmed by his victories at Lodi, Mantua, and Marengo, that they allowed him to take from them all independence and make their states a province of France. He treated Switzerland in the same way.

The peace between France and England lasted but one year, and then Napoleon again prepared for an invasion. A large army was assembled in camps along the coasts of France and Holland, but the French were again hindered from sailing by the vigilance of Nelson.

The coronation of the emperor and empress, [293] on May 18, 1804, was a very grand affair; and the French people seemed to be well satisfied with their new rulers.

A few months later Napoleon went to Milan and there crowned himself "King of Italy" with the famous iron crown of Charlemagne. This angered the Austrians and Russians, and Russia and England became the allies of Austria.

Napoleon continued to wage war until his very name became a terror, and after his great victory at Austerlitz men feared him more and more. At the battle of Jena (ya' na), where he fought against the Prussians, he was again triumphant, and he carried himself as though he was the master of the world.



NAPOLEON AT THE BATTLE OF JENNA

[294] He divorced his wife Josephine, and married Maria Louisa, daughter of the Emperor of Austria.

Troubles again arose with Russia, and Napoleon's advisors tried to persuade him not to go to war; but he said, "The states of Europe must be melted into one nation, and Paris must be its capital."

The Russian army was only about half as large as that of the French. By a system of carefully [295] arranged retreats it lured Napoleon and his men into the very heart of Russia.

Near Moscow a battle was fought which lasted all day, and neither party could claim the victory. Next morning the Russians had disappeared, and the French army entered the city and pillaged it. But so many fires occurred that Napoleon was obliged to leave the city just as the terrible Russian winter began.

When the French entered Moscow, over one hundred thousand soldiers answered the roll-call; but when they returned to France only twelve thousand were alive. It has been well said that "the fortunes of Napoleon were buried in the Russian snows."

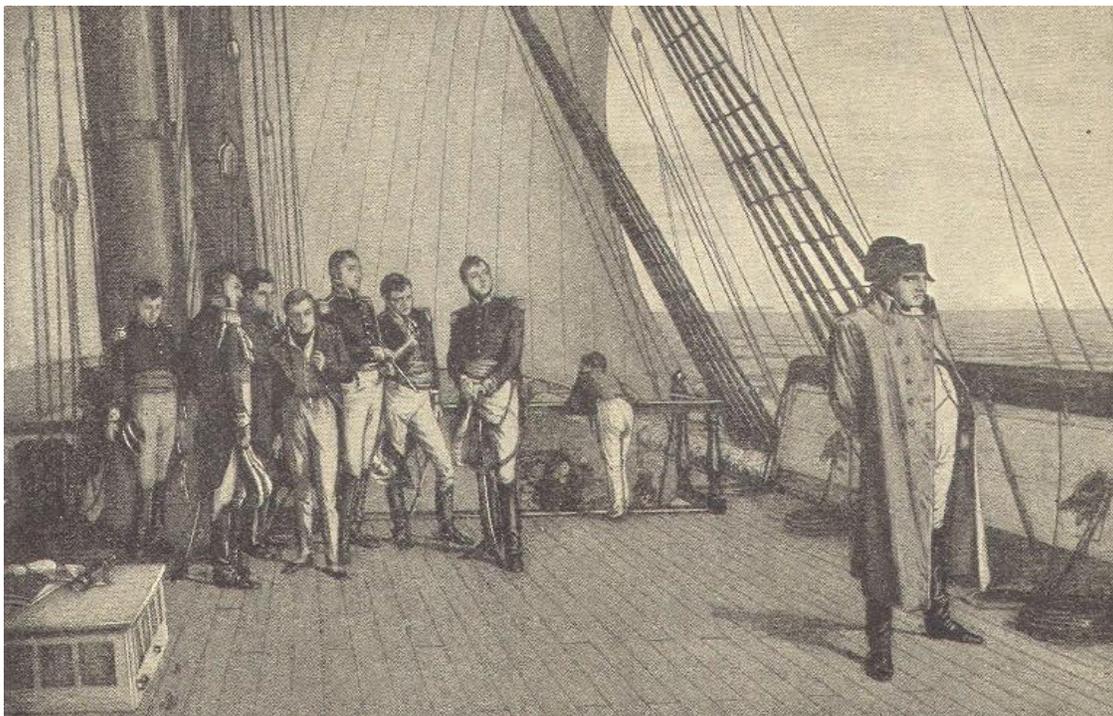
England, Russia, Prussia, Sweden and Austria now declared war against him. He was defeated at Leipzig and again driven back into France. The allied armies pursued him, captured Paris, forced him to abdicate, and placed Louis XVIII on the throne. Napoleon was banished to a little island in the Mediterranean, called Elba.

Louis XVIII tried to govern as his brother had done before the revolution, and the French again became discontented. When, therefore, the news was heard that Napoleon had escaped from Elba and was again in France, the whole [296] nation broke into the wildest rejoicing, and Napoleon was once more emperor.

He marched into Belgium, and there fought his last battle. He had a fine army, and the English and Prussian generals, Wellington and Blucher, were equally well equipped.

Napoleon managed to get between the English and Prussian armies. He defeated the Prussians on June 16, but in turn was beaten by the English. Then on the heights about Waterloo, the decisive battle was fought, June 18, 1815.

Both sides fought with great bravery. In front of the English was a sunken road cut into the hill like a ditch; and this was concealed from the French by a hedge.



NAPOLEON ON BOARD THE BELLEROPHON.

Three thousand five hundred of the French cavalry plunged into this ditch, as they rode up rank after rank; and the survivors were compelled to ride over the struggling bodies of their comrades.

Then the English, drawn up in solid masses, received the French charge on the points of their bayonets, and, at the same time, poured a heavy fire into their broken ranks.

At about five in the afternoon Blucher appeared and united his troops with those of Wellington. Napoleon's famous "Old Guard" made [298] a charge which Wellington himself said was "splendid;" but the French army was thrown into confusion and Wellington won the day.

A month later Napoleon went on board the *Bellerophon*, an English man-of-war, and surrendered himself to the captain. He was afterwards taken by the British to an island in the Atlantic Ocean, called St. Helena, and was kept a prisoner there until his death in 1821.

In 1840, the French government requested the English to allow them to bring his body to France.

In Paris the body was received by Louis Philippe, who was then king of France. More than a million people gathered in the streets through which the funeral procession passed; and thirty thousand were present at the funeral service, which closed with a requiem sung by three hundred voices.

I. Vocabulary: Underline the following words in the fable and define them below

➤ republic: _____

➤ victorious: _____

➤ associates: _____

➤ pursued: _____

II. Plot: write a simple sentence to describe the main actions that take place in each scene

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____

4. _____

5. _____

6. _____

7. _____

8. _____

9. _____

10. _____

11. _____

12. _____

13. _____

14. _____

15. _____

III. Characters: List the main characters and write a few descriptive words for each.
