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HISTORY
OF THE
WAR IN FRANCE AND BELGIUM
IN 1815.

CHAPTER I.

Landing of Napoleon Buonaparte in France after his escape from Elba.—Flight of Louis XVIII.—Decision of the Congress of Vienna.—Preparations on the part of the Allied Powers for opening a campaign against Napoleon.—Great Britain and Prussia occupy Belgium.—Advance of the Russians towards the French frontier.—Advance of the Austrians.—The troops of Bavaria, Baden, Wurtemberg, and of Hesse, assemble upon the Upper Rhine.—Preparations on the part of Napoleon.—General aspect of France.—Spirit of the French army.—Public opinion and state of parties in France.

THE history of Europe records but few events so March.
universally and so intimately involving the policy
and interests of her component states, as the escape
of Napoleon Buonaparte from the island of Elba,
on the 26th of February, 1815—his landing in
France, and his again ascending, unopposed, that
throne, from which Louis XVIII. had fled with
precipitation, upon learning the triumphal approach
towards the capital, of his successful and formidable

March. rival. With the rapidity of lightning the intelligence spread itself over the whole Continent, and with all the suddenness and violence of an electric shock, did it burst amidst the delegates from the different states, who were then assembled in Congress at Vienna. This important assembly, so unexpectedly interrupted, had been called together to deliberate upon measures of international security and prosperity; and to solve those intricate questions of policy necessarily arising out of the various combinations, which, in the course of a general war, carried on with unmitigated violence, and but little intermission, for nearly a quarter of a century, had so fatally unhinged and dismembered the previously existing social order and polity of Europe. With one accord, a fresh appeal to the sword was decided upon; the military resources of every nation were again called into requisition. From state to state the cry "To arms!" was responded to with cheerfulness and alacrity, and immense armies were put in motion towards the French frontier, all animated with the sole object and fixed determination of annihilating, for ever, the common foe whom they had already conquered, but whom, as it would then appear, they had but ineffectually humbled. The openly declared project of the Allied Sovereigns to employ all their means, and combine all their efforts, towards the accomplishment of the complete overthrow of the resuscitated power of Napoleon, with whom they

had determined, thenceforth, to enter into neither March.
 truce nor treaty,* was singularly favoured by the
 circumstance of their armies being still retained
 upon a war establishment. The forces of the several
 Powers were continued on that scale, in consequence
 of the difficulties experienced in the Congress in
 dealing with and settling many perplexing questions
 of international policy, and moderating the warmth
 of the discussions that took place upon them. It
 was considered expedient to keep up powerful
 reserves, available both for home service, and for
 any contingencies that might arise out of combina-
 tions and revolts among those minor states, whose
 aversion to the new political arrangements was
 more than suspected. Thus it had been found
 necessary to detach bodies of troops from the main
 bulk of the forces, in consequence of the state of
 the Poles placed under the protection of Russia,
 and of the Saxons inhabiting that portion of their
 country which had been ceded to Prussia; as
 also, in consequence of the powerful diversion, as
 regarded Austria, caused by the sudden irruption
 of Murat, king of Naples, into the north of Italy.
 Notwithstanding these necessary deductions, how-
 ever, it was found practicable to assemble, by
 the end of May, an efficient force of not less
 than 500,000 men, upon different points conti-
 guous to the French frontier, with all the supplies

* See the Declaration, on the 13th of March, of the Allied Powers,
 on the return of Napoleon Buonaparte to France—Appendix I.

March. necessary for the prosecution of a vigorous campaign.*

The most important portion of this extensive line of frontier was undoubtedly that which fronted the Netherlands ; for although it had been planned by the Allies that no advance was to be made by the troops in Belgium, until the remainder of their forces had reached a line of connecting points along the French frontier, when all their armies were to march, in combined movement, upon the capital, still it was reasonably to be expected, that Napoleon would not wait for the completion of this plan, but rather that he would endeavour, by a decisive effort, if not to frustrate its accomplishment, at least to diminish its efficacy. It required no great exercise of military sagacity or political foresight to predict, that after having adopted a maturely considered disposition of force, on the most important points along his general line of defence, and placed his frontier fortresses upon a respectable footing, Napoleon would open the tremendous game, upon which his crown, his political existence, and the fate of France were now fairly staked, by a bold, sudden, and resolute advance into Belgium—straining every nerve to vanquish, in detail, the allied forces in that densely populated country, of which a vast portion was already prepared to declare in his favour. His

* See the Treaty of Alliance, of the 25th of March, 1815, concluded between Austria, Russia, Prussia, and Great Britain—Appendix II.

authority once established in Brussels, through the means of some great and signal triumph, the accession to his moral influence over the entire mass of the French nation would be immense ; and then, flying to the succour of his nearest corps menaced, from the banks of the Rhine, by the approach of hostile forces, (upon which his possession of Belgium would operate as a powerful check by the facilities thus afforded for a combined attack in front and flank,) a series of brilliant successes, supported by fresh levies from the interior, might enable him even to dictate terms to the Allies, who had indignantly rejected all his overtures.

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Hence the importance of narrowly watching the Belgian frontier, and of making due preparations for meeting any attack in that quarter, was too obvious not to form a principal feature in the general plan of the Allies. Its defence was assigned to an army under the Duke of Wellington, comprising contingent forces from Great Britain, from Hanover, the Netherlands, Brunswick, and Nassau ; and to a Prussian army, under Field Marshal Prince Blücher von Wahlstadt.

At the moment of the landing of Napoleon on the French shore, the only force in the Netherlands consisted, in addition to the native troops, of a weak Anglo-Hanoverian corps, under the command of His Royal Highness the Prince of Orange ; but the zeal, energy, and activity dis-

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played by the government of Great Britain, in engrafting upon this nucleus a powerful army, amounting, at the commencement of hostilities, to about 100,000 combatants, notwithstanding the impediments and delays occasioned by the absence of a considerable portion of its troops in America, were truly surprising. At the same time, the extraordinary supply of subsidies furnished by the British Parliament, without which not one of the armies of the Allied Sovereigns could have commenced operations, and by means of which England thus became the great lever whereby the whole of Europe was set in motion towards the attainment of the one common object, was admirably illustrative of the bold, decided, and straightforward policy of the most determined, the most indefatigable, and the most consistent enemy of Napoleon.

Within the same period, the Prussian forces, originally limited to a corps of 30,000 men, under General Count Kleist von Nollendorf, occupying the Prussian territories bounded by the Rhine, the Meuse, and the Moselle, were augmented to an effective army of 116,000 combatants, with all the rapidity and energy which a keen sense of the wrongs and miseries their country had endured, under the ruthless sway of their inveterate foe, and a salutary dread of a repetition of such infliction, could not fail to inspire.*

* See the Proclamation of the King of Prussia to his army—Appendix III.

Great Britain and Prussia thus occupied the post of honour, and formed the vanguard of the mighty masses which Europe was pouring forth to seal the doom of the Napoleon dynasty.

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A Russian army, under Field Marshal Count Barclay de Tolly, amounting to 167,000 men, was rapidly traversing the whole of Germany, in three main columns, of which the right, commanded by General Dochterow, advanced by Kalisch, Torgau, Leipzig, Erfurt, Hanau, Frankfort, and Hochheim, towards Mayence; the centre, commanded by General Baron Sacken, advanced by Breslau, Dresden, Zwickau, Baireuth, Nuremberg, Aschaffenburg, Dieburg, and Gross-Gerau, towards Oppenheim; while the left column, commanded by General Count Langeron, took its direction along the line of Prague, Aube, Adelsheim, Neckar, and Heidelberg, towards Manheim. The heads of the columns reached the Middle Rhine, when hostilities were on the point of breaking out upon the Belgian frontier. The intimation to these troops, of another campaign in France, and of a probable re-occupation of Paris, had imparted new life and vigour to the spirit of inveterate hatred and insatiable revenge, which they had so thoroughly imbibed against the French, and which had so invariably marked their career since the memorable burning of Moscow.*

* See Address of the Emperor Alexander, to a numerous body of Russian troops which he reviewed on the 5th of April, 1815—Appendix IV.

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An Austrian army of about 50,000 men, commanded by Field Marshal Prince Schwartzenburg, and the army of reserve, under the Archduke Ferdinand, amounting to 40,000 men, were gradually occupying the most important points along the right bank of the Rhine, between Basle and Manheim. In addition to this force, about 120,000 men were then assembling on the plains of Lombardy, upon the termination of the decisive campaign against Murat, which secured the deposition of the latter, and the restoration of King Ferdinand to the throne of Naples. Vigorous and energetic measures such as these on the part of Austria, clearly indicated that her government, discarding alike the circumstance of a family alliance with Napoleon, and the views which had once induced it to enter into a league with him, and with the southern German states, as a security against its formidable northern neighbours, still adhered with inflexible resolution to its subsequently adopted policy of entering into, and fostering, a general European compact, having for its object the complete annihilation of the despotic sway of the ambitious soldier-sovereign of the French.

The assembling also, on the Upper Rhine, of a Bavarian army, commanded by Prince Wrede, of the contingents of Baden and Wurtemberg, under the hereditary Prince of Wurtemberg, and of the troops of Hesse, amounting altogether to about 80,000 men, offered a sufficient guarantee for the

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line of policy espoused by the confederated states of the Rhine. March
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Formidable as was the attitude assumed by the Allies towards France, and imposing as was their array of armies assembling upon her frontier, they nevertheless found their great antagonist prepared, on learning that they had determined on an irrevocable appeal to the sword, to throw away the scabbard. He assumed a bold and resolute posture of defence—armed at all points, and prepared at all hazards, either to ward off the blows of his adversaries, or to become himself the assailant. The indefatigable exertions of Napoleon in restoring the empire to its former strength and grandeur, were really astonishing; and never, perhaps, in the whole course of the extraordinary career of that extraordinary man, did the powerful energies of his comprehensive mind shine forth with greater brilliancy and effect, than in his truly wonderful and incredibly rapid development of the national resources of France, on this momentous occasion. The truth of this assertion will be best confirmed by briefly enumerating some of the most important objects accomplished within the limited interval of three months—from his landing at Cannes, to his taking the field against the Allies. Among them were—the complete overthrow of all obstacles in the way of his re-ascending the throne; the reconciliation, to a very considerable extent, of the several factions whose discordant views and inte-

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rests had distracted the whole nation; the suppression of the insurrectionary movements in La Vendée, and the establishment of his authority over every part of the empire; the projection of various public measures, laws, and ordinances; the remodelling of the civil and military administrations; the restoration of the army to its previous organization under the imperial regime; the placing of the numerous fortresses of the kingdom in an efficient state; the erection of fortified works around Paris, Lyons, and other important points; the reorganization of the national guard *d'élite*, to the extent of 112,000 men, divided into 200 battalions, and destined principally for garrisoning the fortresses; the adoption of the most active operations in all the arsenals, and the employment of vast numbers of additional workmen in the manufacture of arms and ammunition. Before all these we ought to place the raising, clothing, arming, drilling, and organizing of 410,000 men, (including the national guard *d'élite*,) which, in addition to the 149,000 men of which the royal army consisted on the 1st of March, formed, on the 1st of June, an effective force of 559,000 men, available for the national defence.

Of this number, the effective force of the troops of the line amounted to 217,000 men, and the regimental dépôts to 146,000 men: the remainder, consisting of 200 battalions of the national guard