

## Napoleon's Tomb and Versailles.

In the Eighth of His Letters From Abroad Editor Poe Writes of the Wonderful Shrine by Which France Honors the Memory of Napoleon and of the Sins of the French Babylon Which Were Followed by the Fires of the French Revolution—A Terrible Chapter in the Sowing and Reaping of Nations.

He was not a young man swept off his feet by youthful enthusiasm: he was a man upon whose head were the snows of more than three-score winters but whose mind is as active as ever, and he was talking to me last spring of his trip to Europe a year ago and especially of the magnificent mausoleum which the French people have erected as the last resting place of Napoleon Bonaparte.

"By Heaven," he exclaimed, "it was worth the trip across the Atlantic to stand at the tomb of that colossal man!"

I am now almost prepared to agree with him: certainly I have seen nothing more impressive since I left America. The splendid structure, beautiful and airy as a palace, built entirely of white marble and surmounted by a gilded dome, itself challenges interest and admiration; but it is only when we enter the spacious chapel that the sublimity of the builder's conception dawns upon us. Here is solemnity unmarred by any suggestion of the funereal: the majesty of death without any trace of its gruesomeness. Massive bronze doors guard the entrance to where the body rests in its immense sarcophagus, and by the side of the doors are two kingly statues bearing in their hands the symbols of earthly power and dominion, the one the globe and the sword, the other the crown and the sceptre. On either side stained glass windows such as I have seen nowhere else in the world let in the light in a golden flood suggesting the beauty and the calm of an unending sunset. Above you are the words from Napoleon's will, written in exile in distant St. Helena: "I desire that my body shall rest on the banks of the Seine, and among the French people whom I have loved so well." There is pathos unspeakable about the words and about the tragedy which they call to mind. Once he could have willed kingdoms and crowns; the proudest thrones of Europe had been at his disposal, and he had given sceptres to his brothers and his favorites as if crowns were but the baubles of an hour. Now the Napoleon who makes his last testament sees Death, the conqueror of conquerors, coming as a welcome relief, and he who—

"once trod the ways of glory  
And sounded all the depths and shoals of honor,"  
can will little but his body itself, and cannot know that even this request for a burial place will be granted. Weary and heartsick, broken with the storms of state, how it would have rejoiced his heart could he have known with what honor his ashes would finally be entombed in his loved Paris and how here for aeons to come travelers from every corner of the earth would pause to pay tribute to one of the mightiest men who ever walked this globe of ours.

The fame of Napoleon is the surer because of the threefold character of his appeal to human interest—the romance of his rise, the epic of his achievements, the tragedy of his fall: each in itself sublime. Born of humble parents and upon a narrow island, his imperial mind and will won him place after place until he became the mightiest name in a thousand years of history. Power such as the Caesars had not known was his, and when he walked into the church of St. Denis here to wed the daughter of a King, he might have dreamed not without warrant of becoming the master of all Europe. He had great faults, I grant, but in character few of our chiefest warrior-rulers stand above him, and so long as the minds of men

are stirred by mighty deeds wrought in spite of frowning circumstances, and so long as men's hearts are moved by the tragedy of a great man's fall, just so long will the blood quicken when Napoleon's name is mentioned, and just so long will men make pilgrimage here, as I have done, to Notre Dame where he was crowned, to St. Denis where he married, to his tomb here where he is buried, and to the Museum of History where so many relics both of his palmy days and of his twilight in lonely St. Helena are shown to interested thousands.

Of so much interest is the career of Napoleon, and I have seen so many traces of his footsteps here—some of his letters, his coronation robes, his bed-room and reception rooms at Versailles, the unpromising-looking rooms overlooking the Seine where he lodged before he became famous, his chair and bench and camp-bed from St. Helena, and his sword, saddle, hat and his famous war coat—that it is hard not to give an entire article to this one subject; but I must hurry on, for Paris is full of historic and notable spots, and I am trying to tell in a letter what should be told in a book.

Our first full day in Paris was spent at Versailles, where the French Kings once lived in shameless splendor and unconcern, and where a corrupt and profligate court once piled up wrath against the day of wrath, until the storm broke in blood and fury upon them some six score years ago. For long, long decades had the weary peasants of France toiled from year's end to year's end, only to see King and priest and noble seize the lion's share of their hard-won harvests, government and church all the while growing more haughty and rotten and corrupt, and the peasant's lot harder and more hopeless. Stolid and spiritless perhaps this peasant seemed to the proud nobles who lived upon his labors and despised him, who felt that neither he nor his family had any rights that they were bound to respect; and yet an Edwin Markham would have seen in this oppressed and clouded figure the portent and prophecy of the coming Revolution.

"O masters, lords and rulers in all lands,  
How will the future reckon with this Man?  
How answer his brute question in that hour  
When whirlwinds of rebellion shake the world?  
How will it be with kingdoms and with kings—  
With those who shaped him to the thing he is—  
When this dumb Terror shall reply to God  
After the silence of the centuries?"

Let us go then to Versailles to-day and see where the French Babylon once reared its lofty head, where women as vile as they were beautiful once ruled the court of France, and where the peasant's hard-earned taxes were wasted in vice and gambling and display. Here before us now is the gorgeous bed upon which Louis XIV., "the Grand Monarch," died in 1715, and we may well wonder if in death the avenging angel did not whisper to him of the impending doom which his folly had done so much to insure; or if neither he nor his yet more worthless successor, Louis XV., (who died in the room to our left) did not once stumble upon a hearing or reading of that passage wherein we are told that the cries of the defrauded laborer have "entered into the ears of the Lord of Sabaoth," and—

"Your riches are corrupted and your garments are moth-eaten. Your gold and silver is cankered and the rust of them shall be a

witness against you, and shall eat your flesh as it were fire."

We may not know whether or not this fearful warning ever came to the ears of the pleasure-loving court that once flitted through the royal palace of Versailles, but the record of these historic walls only affords fresh proof that the Apostle's language is sound political as it is religious doctrine. "The mills of the gods grind slowly, but they grind exceeding small." The avenging Nemesis of nations never sleeps; the relentless rectitude of Nature never fails. On heedless ears too often falls the phrase, "The wages of sin is death," and yet all human history, even more loudly than the Book of God itself, proclaims the truth of this everlasting doctrine. To-day "careless seems the Great Avenger" as we look upon Versailles, and with our mind's eye people it again with those lordly figures who "have lived in pleasure on the earth and been wanton, who have condemned and killed the just"; but yonder in the distance looms the Place la Concorde where with our mind's eye we see the bloody guillotine, and the heads of King and Queen and nobles required in this final settlement with long delayed and patient justice. The debt of the ages is settled. Those who have sowed the wind have reaped the whirlwind—or alas! in too many cases, not they themselves, but their children and children's children.

This is the tragedy of life—that Nature, itself immortal, reckons not of man's mortality. Your father owed a debt and died having enjoyed but not having settled: and you, standing in his place, must pay. Your father through sin and crime made grievous debt to Nature, and his children, with meaner souls and diseased bodies, must pay the price. And even so one generation of citizens permits injustice, fosters evil,—whether by indifference or by vicious intent, it matters not—and the next generation must pay the price in war and riot and revolution. Our Revolutionary fathers in America, North and South, tempted of Mammon, permitted and encouraged the sin of human slavery; our fathers a generation ago, from North and South, paid the awful price in peace and blood and treasure. The French nobility for centuries ground the faces of the poor, violated their homes, robbed them of the fruits of their labor, until the French Revolution, the hideous progeny of their long, long years of evil, came forth in the fulness of time to plague their children and must stand forever as one of the most fearful nightmares of human history. Read Dickens's "Tale of Two Cities" and the story of the prisoner in the Bastille (Dr. Manette, I think, is the name), and you will wonder how any one could have expected any other harvest from such a sowing.

For the excesses of the Revolution I have no excuse; no one is further than I from wishing to palliate its own shameful crimes. But no one who knows history can stand to-day at Versailles and think of its corrupt court, the symbol of wrong and oppression, and then stand to-morrow at the Place la Concorde and think of the hundreds of nobles whose lives the infuriated populace here required, and not see that the one follows the other as inevitably as the night the day.

With nations as with individuals, it is the weary round of history: to-day you make the debt; to-morrow you must pay the price. Whatsoever man or nation soweth that also shall man or nation reap.

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Every day that is born into this world comes like a burst of music, and rings itself all the day through, and thou shalt make it a dance, a dirge, or a life march, as thou wilt.—Thomas Carlyle.