

Whether this was their plan we cannot tell; but nothing less than the Emperor's good fortune was required to prevent its being realized. In fact not only did the Kremlin contain, unknown to us, a magazine of gun-powder; but that very night, the guards asleep and carelessly posted, suffered a whole park of artillery to enter and draw up under the windows of Napoleon.

"It was at this moment, the furious flames were driven from all quarters, and with the greatest violence towards the Kremlin; for the wind, attracted no doubt by this vast combustion, increased every moment in strength. The flower of the army and the Emperor would have been lost, if but one of the brands that flew over our heads had alighted on one of the Caissons. Thus upon each of the sparks that were for several hours floating in the air, depended the fate of the whole army.

"At length the day, a gloomy day appeared; it came to add itself to the horrors of the scene, and to deprive it of its brilliancy. Many of the officers sought refuge in the halls of the palace. The Chiefs, and Mortier himself overcome by the fire, with which for thirty-six hours they had been contending, there dropped down from fatigue and despair.

"They said nothing and we accused ourselves. Most imagined that want of discipline in our troops and intoxication had begun the disaster, and that the high wind had completed it. We viewed ourselves with a sort of disgust. The cry of horror that all Europe would not fail to set up, affrighted us. Filled with consternation by so tremendous a catastrophe, we accosted each other with down-cast looks; it sullied our glory; it deprived us of the fruit of it, it threatened our present and our future existence; we were now but an army of criminals, whom Heaven and the civilized world would severely judge. From these overwhelming thoughts and paroxysms of rage against the incendiaries, we were roused only by an eagerness to obtain intelligence; and all the accounts began to accuse the Russians alone of this disaster.

"In fact, Officers arrived from all quarters, and they all agreed. The very first night, that between the 14th and 15th a fire balloon had settled on the palace of prince Trubatskoi, and consumed it; this was a signal. Fire had been immediately set to the exchange; Russian police soldiers had been seen stirring it up with tarred lances. Here, howitzer shells, perfidiously placed, had discharged themselves in the stoves of several houses, and wounded the military who crowded round them. Retiring to other quarters which were still standing, they sought fresh retreats; but when on the point of entering houses closely shut up and uninhabited, they had heard faint explosions within; these were succeeded by a light smoke, which immediately became thick and black, then reddish, and lastly the colour of fire, and presently the whole edifice was involved in flames.

"All had seen hideous-looking men, covered with rags, and women resembling furies, wandering among these flames, and completing a frightful image of the infernal regions. These wretches intoxicated with wine and the success of their crimes, were no longer at the pains to conceal themselves; they proceeded in triumph through the blazing streets; they were caught armed with torches assiduously striving