FOLLOWING his defeat at Waterloo on June 18th, 1815, Napoleon returned to Paris. As he had come to dislike the Tuileries, which had no private gardens, he retired to the seclusion of the Elysée Palace, where he abdicated. He was joined by Hortense, ex-Queen of Holland, who was both his step-daughter, being a daughter of Josephine, and his sister-in-law, having been married to, but now separated from his brother, Louis Bonaparte. After days of vacillation, on June 25th, he secretly drove in a carriage, with blinds drawn, to Malmaison, eight miles from Paris, the home of his divorced wife Josephine, who had died about one year previously while he was in exile in the island of Elba. On his journey, he drove up the Avenue des Champs Elysées, crossed at the Etoile and turned on the rough patch of ground—stones, sand, and wild thickets—where they had begun to lay the foundations of the Arc de Triomphe. Some twenty-five years later, on December 15th, 1840, his coffin was borne triumphantly beneath this same arch on its way to the Invalides. Whilst at Malmaison, he decided to flee the country and, if possible, to escape to America. The French Provisional Government reluctantly agreed to place two ships, the Saale and the Meduse, then at anchor in the harbour of Rochefort, at his disposal.

On June 29th, with allied troops within a few miles of Malmaison, he bade farewell to his mother, Madame Mère and to his friends, and accompanied by his retinue set off by road for the coast and reached the harbour of Rochefort on July 3rd. Doctor Louis Pierre Maingault, thirty-two years of age, thinking the Emperor was going to America, agreed to accompany him at a salary of £480 per annum. His personal physician, Doctor Jean Nicholas Corvisart, aged sixty years, suffered a stroke after the Battle of Waterloo and was unable to travel and recommended Maingault for the position. Corvisart had taught Laennec, the inventor of the stethoscope and Dupuytren of contracture fame. He visited the Emperor at Malmaison and gave him a small phial of reddish liquid poison which remained strapped to Napoleon's braces until after he reached the island of St. Helena. The British Navy, aware of his defeat, were patrolling every port, including the port of Rochefort. In anguish and doubt, he considered the proposals of eluding the enemy, but eventually decided to surrender. Accompanied by his retinue, he boarded the British man-of-war, Bellerophon, on July 15th. The Emperor's surrender was accepted by Captain F. L. Maitland, who immediately set sail for England with his prize. It was a rough passage and many of the French, including Dr. Maingault, were sea-sick. The ship's surgeon was called to their assistance and, in these circumstances, Doctor Barry Edmond O'Meara of Mallow met Napoleon Bonaparte. The Emperor took a liking to the Irishman because of his pleasant manner and his knowledge of Italian. On arrival in Torbay, the French hopes of being allowed