



# Napoleon & Marie Louise: The Emperor's Second Wife

*Mr. Alan Palmer*

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"Archduchesses have always been disastrous for France," Napoleon once remarked. Yet in 1810 he married Archduchess Marie Louise, the eighteen-year-old daughter of his lifelong enemy, the Emperor of Austria. On January 5, 1810, she had read in the newspapers of the act of separation between Napoleon and his wife and wrote to her father, "I must admit, dear Papa, that I am very disturbed by this news." And to her friend Victoria de Poutet she wrote the next day, "I pity the unfortunate woman on whom his choice falls; that will certainly put an end to her fine days." Though their union was politically expedient, Napoleon lived happily and proudly with "my good Louise" until defeat sent him to Elba and she returned to Vienna, eventually becoming the sovereign of an Italian duchy. Alan Palmer gives the first detailed portrait of this extraordinary episode in Europe's history. He traces the changing fortunes of France and Austria through the years of Napoleonic ascendancy and eclipse. By using extracts from Louise's letters and travel diaries, he throws light on the conflicting worlds and torn loyalties which perplexed France's young, and often courageous, Empress. Personal touches are many and amusing, as in Louise's letters to her mother telling of their travels through sleet and rain and miles and miles of muddy roads. Overnight stops were made at wayside taverns ill-suited for families of distinction - one evening there was an insect hunt in an infested bedroom, with Louise claiming that she had swatted the largest bug of all, whom she dubbed "Napoleon." Alan Palmer also examines the controversial years in which their son was raised to manhood in Vienna while Louise, with her secret second family, reigned in Parma as a benevolent Duchess, whose cultural legacy has survived into the 21st century. **AUTHOR BIO:** Alan Palmer is an acclaimed historian, the author of several books including *Napoleon in Russia*, *An Encyclopaedia of Napoleon's Europe*, *Twilight of the Habsburgs*, *Victory 1918*, and biographies of Metternich, Tsar Alexander I and Bernadotte.

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