

LOUIS DE BOURRIENNE

MEMOIRS OF NAPOLEON
BONAPARTE — VOLUME
01

Louis Antoine Fauvelet Bourrienne
Memoirs of Napoleon
Bonaparte — Volume 01

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Memoirs of Napoleon Bonaparte — Volume 01:*

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de Bourrienne
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**PREFACE BY THE EDITORS
OF THE 1836 EDITION**

In introducing the present edition of M. de Bourrienne's Memoirs to the public we are bound, as Editors, to say a few Words on the subject. Agreeing, however, with Horace Walpole that an editor should not dwell for any length of time on the merits of his author, we shall touch but lightly on this part of the matter. We are the more ready to abstain since the great success in England of the former editions of these Memoirs, and the high reputation they have acquired on the European Continent, and in every part of the civilised world where the fame of Bonaparte has ever reached, sufficiently establish the merits of M. de Bourrienne as a biographer. These merits seem to us to consist chiefly in an anxious desire to be impartial, to point out the defects as well as the merits of a most wonderful man; and in a peculiarly graphic power of relating facts and

anecdotes. With this happy faculty Bourrienne would have made the life of almost any active individual interesting; but the subject of which the most favourable circumstances permitted him to treat was full of events and of the most extraordinary facts. The hero of his story was such a being as the world has produced only on the rarest occasions, and the complete counterpart to whom has, probably, never existed; for there are broad shades of difference between Napoleon and Alexander, Caesar, and Charlemagne; neither will modern history furnish more exact parallels, since Gustavus Adolphus, Frederick the Great, Cromwell, Washington, or Bolivar bear but a small resemblance to Bonaparte either in character, fortune, or extent of enterprise. For fourteen years, to say nothing of his projects in the East, the history of Bonaparte was the history of all Europe!

With the copious materials he possessed, M. de Bourrienne has produced a work which, for deep interest, excitement, and amusement, can scarcely be paralleled by any of the numerous and excellent memoirs for which the literature of France is so justly celebrated.

M. de Bourrienne shows us the hero of Marengo and Austerlitz in his night-gown and slippers—with a 'trait de plume' he, in a hundred instances, places the real man before us, with all his personal habits and peculiarities of manner, temper, and conversation.

The friendship between Bonaparte and Bourrienne began in boyhood, at the school of Brienne, and their unreserved intimacy

continued during the most brilliant part of Napoleon's career. We have said enough, the motives for his writing this work and his competency for the task will be best explained in M. de Bourrienne's own words, which the reader will find in the Introductory Chapter.

M. de Bourrienne says little of Napoleon after his first abdication and retirement to Elba in 1814: we have endeavoured to fill up the chasm thus left by following his hero through the remaining seven years of his life, to the "last scenes of all" that ended his "strange, eventful history," —to his deathbed and alien grave at St. Helena. A completeness will thus be given to the work which it did not before possess, and which we hope will, with the other additions and improvements already alluded to, tend to give it a place in every well-selected library, as one of the most satisfactory of all the lives of Napoleon.

LONDON, 1836.

PREFACE BY THE EDITOR OF THE 1885 EDITION

The Memoirs of the time of Napoleon may be divided into two classes— those by marshals and officers, of which Suchet's is a good example, chiefly devoted to military movements, and those by persons employed in the administration and in the Court, giving us not only materials for history, but also valuable details of the personal and inner life of the great Emperor and of his immediate surroundings. Of this latter class the Memoirs of Bourrienne are among the most important.

Long the intimate and personal friend of Napoleon both at school and from the end of the Italian campaigns in 1797 till 1802—working in the same room with him, using the same purse, the confidant of most of his schemes, and, as his secretary, having the largest part of all the official and private correspondence of the time passed through his hands, Bourrienne occupied an invaluable position for storing and recording materials for history. The Memoirs of his successor, Meneval, are more those of an esteemed private secretary; yet, valuable and interesting as they are, they want the peculiarity of position which marks those of Bourrienne, who was a compound of secretary, minister, and friend. The accounts of such men as Miot de Melito, Raederer, etc., are most valuable, but these

writers were not in that close contact with Napoleon enjoyed by Bourrienne. Bourrienne's position was simply unique, and we can only regret that he did not occupy it till the end of the Empire. Thus it is natural that his Memoirs should have been largely used by historians, and to properly understand the history of the time, they must be read by all students. They are indeed full of interest for every one. But they also require to be read with great caution. When we meet with praise of Napoleon, we may generally believe it, for, as Thiers (*Consulat.*, ii. 279) says, Bourrienne need be little suspected on this side, for although he owed everything to Napoleon, he has not seemed to remember it. But very often in passages in which blame is thrown on Napoleon, Bourrienne speaks, partly with much of the natural bitterness of a former and discarded friend, and partly with the curious mixed feeling which even the brothers of Napoleon display in their Memoirs, pride in the wonderful abilities evinced by the man with whom he was allied, and jealousy at the way in which he was outshone by the man he had in youth regarded as inferior to himself. Sometimes also we may even suspect the praise. Thus when Bourrienne defends Napoleon for giving, as he alleges, poison to the sick at Jaffa, a doubt arises whether his object was to really defend what to most Englishmen of this day, with remembrances of the deeds and resolutions of the Indian Mutiny, will seem an act to be pardoned, if not approved; or whether he was more anxious to fix the committal of the act on Napoleon at a time when public opinion loudly blamed it. The same may be said of his defence

of the massacre of the prisoners of Jaffa.

Louis Antoine Fauvelet de Bourrienne was born in 1769, that is, in the same year as Napoleon Bonaparte, and he was the friend and companion of the future Emperor at the military school of Brienne-le-Chateau till 1784, when Napoleon, one of the sixty pupils maintained at the expense of the State, was passed on to the Military School of Paris. The friends again met in 1792 and in 1795, when Napoleon was hanging about Paris, and when Bourrienne looked on the vague dreams of his old schoolmate as only so much folly. In 1796, as soon as Napoleon had assured his position at the head of the army of Italy, anxious as ever to surround himself with known faces, he sent for Bourrienne to be his secretary. Bourrienne had been appointed in 1792 as secretary of the Legation at Stuttgart, and had, probably wisely, disobeyed the orders given him to return, thus escaping the dangers of the Revolution. He only came back to Paris in 1795, having thus become an emigré. He joined Napoleon in 1797, after the Austrians had been beaten out of Italy, and at once assumed the office of secretary which he held for so long. He had sufficient tact to forbear treating the haughty young General with any assumption of familiarity in public, and he was indefatigable enough to please even the never-resting Napoleon. Talent Bourrienne had in abundance; indeed he is careful to hint that at school if any one had been asked to predict greatness for any pupil, it was Bourrienne, not Napoleon, who would have been fixed on as the future star. He went with his General to Egypt,

and returned with him to France. While Napoleon was making his formal entry into the Tuilleries, Bourrienne was preparing the cabinet he was still to share with the Consul. In this cabinet—our cabinet, as he is careful to call it—he worked with the First Consul till 1802.

During all this time the pair lead lives on terms of equality and friendship creditable to both. The secretary neither asked for nor received any salary: when he required money, he simply dipped into the cash-box of the First Consul. As the whole power of the State gradually passed into the hands of the Consul, the labours of the secretary became heavier. His successor broke down under a lighter load, and had to receive assistance; but, perhaps borne up by the absorbing interest of the work and the great influence given by his post, Bourrienne stuck to his place, and to all appearance might, except for himself, have come down to us as the companion of Napoleon during his whole life. He had enemies, and one of them—[Boulay de la Meurthe.]—has not shrunk from describing their gratification at the disgrace of the trusted secretary. Any one in favour, or indeed in office, under Napoleon was the sure mark of calumny for all aspirants to place; yet Bourrienne might have weathered any temporary storm raised by unfounded reports as successfully as Meneval, who followed him. But Bourrienne's hands were not clean in money matters, and that was an unpardonable sin in any one who desired to be in real intimacy with Napoleon. He became involved in the affairs of the House of Coulon,

which failed, as will be seen in the notes, at the time of his disgrace; and in October 1802 he was called on to hand over his office to Meneval, who retained it till invalided after the Russian campaign.

As has been said, Bourrienne would naturally be the mark for many accusations, but the conclusive proof of his misconduct—at least for any one acquainted with Napoleon's objection and dislike to changes in office, whether from his strong belief in the effects of training, or his equally strong dislike of new faces round him—is that he was never again employed near his old comrade; indeed he really never saw the Emperor again at any private interview, except when granted the naval official reception in 1805, before leaving to take up his post at Hamburg, which he held till 1810. We know that his re-employment was urged by Josephine and several of his former companions. Savary himself says he tried his advocacy; but Napoleon was inexorable to those who, in his own phrase, had sacrificed to the golden calf.

Sent, as we have said, to Hamburg in 1805, as Minister Plenipotentiary to the Duke of Brunswick, the Duke of Mecklenburg-Schwerin, and to the Hanse towns, Bourrienne knew how to make his post an important one. He was at one of the great seats of the commerce which suffered so fearfully from the Continental system of the Emperor, and he was charged to watch over the German press. How well he fulfilled this duty we learn from Metternich, who writes in 1805: "I have sent an article to the newspaper editors in Berlin and to M. de

Hofer at Hamburg. I do not know whether it has been accepted, for M. Bourrienne still exercises an authority so severe over these journals that they are always submitted to him before they appear, that he may erase or alter the articles which do not please him."

His position at Hamburg gave him great opportunities for both financial and political intrigues. In his Memoirs, as Meneval remarks, he or his editor is not ashamed to boast of being thanked by Louis XVIII. at St. Ouen for services rendered while he was the minister of Napoleon at Hamburg. He was recalled in 1810, when the Hanse towns were united, or, to use the phrase of the day, re-united to the Empire. He then hung about Paris, keeping on good terms with some of the ministers—Savary, not the most reputable of them, for example. In 1814 he was to be found at the office of Lavallette, the head of the posts, disguising, his enemies said, his delight at the bad news which was pouring in, by exaggerated expressions of devotion. He is accused of a close and suspicious connection with Talleyrand, and it is odd that when Talleyrand became head of the Provisional Government in 1814, Bourrienne of all persons should have been put at the head of the posts. Received in the most flattering manner by Louis XVIII, he was as astonished as poor Beugnot was in 1815, to find himself on 13th May suddenly ejected from office, having, however, had time to furnish post-horses to Manbreuil for the mysterious expedition, said to have been at least known to Talleyrand, and intended certainly for the robbery of the Queen of Westphalia,

and probably for the murder of Napoleon.

In the extraordinary scurry before the Bourbons scuttled out of Paris in 1814, Bourrienne was made Prefet of the Police for a few days, his tenure of that post being signalled by the abortive attempt to arrest Fouché, the only effect of which was to drive that wily minister into the arms of the Bonapartists.

He fled with the King, and was exempted from the amnesty proclaimed by Napoleon. On the return from Ghent he was made a Minister of State without portfolio, and also became one of the Council. The ruin of his finances drove him out of France, but he eventually died in a madhouse at Caen.

When the Memoirs first appeared in 1829 they made a great sensation. Till then in most writings Napoleon had been treated as either a demon or as a demi-god. The real facts of the case were not suited to the tastes of either his enemies or his admirers. While the monarchs of Europe had been disputing among themselves about the division of the spoils to be obtained from France and from the unsettlement of the Continent, there had arisen an extraordinarily clever and unscrupulous man who, by alternately bribing and overthrowing the great monarchies, had soon made himself master of the mainland. His admirers were unwilling to admit the part played in his success by the jealousy of his foes of each other's share in the booty, and they delighted to invest him with every great quality which man could possess. His enemies were ready enough to allow his military talents, but they wished to attribute the first success of his not

very deep policy to a marvellous duplicity, apparently considered by them the more wicked as possessed by a parvenu emperor, and far removed, in a moral point of view, from the statecraft so allowable in an ancient monarchy. But for Napoleon himself and his family and Court there was literally no limit to the really marvellous inventions of his enemies. He might enter every capital on the Continent, but there was some consolation in believing that he himself was a monster of wickedness, and his Court but the scene of one long protracted orgie.

There was enough against the Emperor in the Memoirs to make them comfortable reading for his opponents, though very many of the old calumnies were disposed of in them. They contained indeed the nearest approximation to the truth which had yet appeared. Metternich, who must have been a good judge, as no man was better acquainted with what he himself calls the "age of Napoleon," says of the Memoirs: "If you want something to read, both interesting and amusing, get the *Memoires de Bourrienne*. These are the only authentic Memoirs of Napoleon which have yet appeared. The style is not brilliant, but that only makes them the more trustworthy." Indeed, Metternich himself in his own Memoirs often follows a good deal in the line of Bourrienne: among many formal attacks, every now and then he lapses into half involuntary and indirect praise of his great antagonist, especially where he compares the men he had to deal with in aftertimes with his former rapid and talented interlocutor. To some even among the Bonapartists, Bourrienne

was not altogether distasteful. Lucien Bonaparte, remarking that the time in which Bourrienne treated with Napoleon as equal with equal did not last long enough for the secretary, says he has taken a little revenge in his Memoirs, just as a lover, after a break with his mistress, reveals all her defects. But Lucien considers that Bourrienne gives us a good enough idea of the young officer of the artillery, of the great General, and of the First Consul. Of the Emperor, says Lucien, he was too much in retirement to be able to judge equally well. But Lucien was not a fair representative of the Bonapartists; indeed he had never really thought well of his brother or of his actions since Lucien, the former "Brutus" Bonaparte, had ceased to be the adviser of the Consul. It was well for Lucien himself to amass a fortune from the presents of a corrupt court, and to be made a Prince and Duke by the Pope, but he was too sincere a republican not to disapprove of the imperial system. The real Bonapartists were naturally and inevitably furious with the Memoirs. They were not true, they were not the work of Bourrienne, Bourrienne himself was a traitor, a purloiner of manuscripts, his memory was as bad as his principles, he was not even entitled to the de before his name. If the Memoirs were at all to be pardoned, it was because his share was only really a few notes wrung from him by large pecuniary offers at a time when he was pursued by his creditors, and when his brain was already affected.

The Bonapartist attack on the Memoirs was delivered in full form, in two volumes, 'Bourrienne et ses Erreurs, Volontaires

et Involontaires' (Paris, Heideloff, 1830), edited by the Comte d'Aure, the Ordonnateur en Chef of the Egyptian expedition, and containing communications from Joseph Bonaparte, Gourgaud, Stein, etc.'

—[In the notes in this present edition these volumes are referred to in brief 'Erreurs'.]—

Part of the system of attack was to call in question the authenticity of the Memoirs, and this was the more easy as Bourrienne, losing his fortune, died in 1834 in a state of imbecility. But this plan is not systematically followed, and the very reproaches addressed to the writer of the Memoirs often show that it was believed they were really written by Bourrienne. They undoubtedly contain plenty of faults. The editor (Villemarest, it is said) probably had a large share in the work, and Bourrienne must have forgotten or misplaced many dates and occurrences. In such a work, undertaken so many years after the events, it was inevitable that many errors should be made, and that many statements should be at least debatable. But on close investigation the work stands the attack in a way that would be impossible unless it had really been written by a person in the peculiar position occupied by Bourrienne. He has assuredly not exaggerated that position: he really, says Lucien Bonaparte, treated as equal with equal with Napoleon during a part of his career, and he certainly was the nearest friend and confidant that Napoleon ever had in his life.

Where he fails, or where the Bonapartist fire is most telling, is in the account of the Egyptian expedition. It may seem odd that he should have forgotten, even in some thirty years, details such as the way in which the sick were removed; but such matters were not in his province; and it would be easy to match similar omissions in other works, such as the accounts of the Crimea, and still more of the Peninsula. It is with his personal relations with Napoleon that we are most concerned, and it is in them that his account receives most corroboration.

It may be interesting to see what has been said of the Memoirs by other writers. We have quoted Metternich, and Lucien Bonaparte; let us hear Meneval, his successor, who remained faithful to his master to the end: "Absolute confidence cannot be given to statements contained in Memoirs published under the name of a man who has not composed them. It is known that the editor of these Memoirs offered to M. de Bourrienne, who had then taken refuge in Holstein from his creditors, a sum said to be thirty thousand francs to obtain his signature to them, with some notes and addenda. M. de Bourrienne was already attacked by the disease from which he died a few years latter in a maison de santé at Caen. Many literary men co-operated in the preparation of his Memoirs. In 1825 I met M. de Bourrienne in Paris. He told me it had been suggested to him to write against the Emperor. 'Notwithstanding the harm he has done me,' said he, 'I would never do so. Sooner may my hand be withered.' If M. de Bourrienne had prepared his Memoirs himself, he would not

have stated that while he was the Emperor's minister at Hamburg he worked with the agents of the Comte de Lille (Louis XVIII.) at the preparation of proclamations in favour of that Prince, and that in 1814 he accepted the thanks of the King, Louis XVIII., for doing so; he would not have said that Napoleon had confided to him in 1805 that he had never conceived the idea of an expedition into England, and that the plan of a landing, the preparations for which he gave such publicity to, was only a snare to amuse fools. The Emperor well knew that never was there a plan more seriously conceived or more positively settled. M. de Bourrienne would not have spoken of his private interviews with Napoleon, nor of the alleged confidences entrusted to him, while really Napoleon had no longer received him after the 20th October 1802. When the Emperor, in 1805, forgetting his faults, named him Minister Plenipotentiary at Hamburg, he granted him the customary audience, but to this favour he did not add the return of his former friendship. Both before and afterwards he constantly refused to receive him, and he did not correspond with him "(Meneval, ii. 378-79). And in another passage Meneval says: "Besides, it would be wrong to regard these Memoirs as the work of the man whose name they bear. The bitter resentment M. de Bourrienne had nourished for his disgrace, the enfeeblement of his faculties, and the poverty he was reduced to, rendered him accessible to the pecuniary offers made to him. He consented to give the authority of his name to Memoirs in whose composition he had only co-operated by incomplete, confused, and often

inexact notes, materials which an editor was employed to put in order." And Meneval (iii. 29-30) goes on to quote what he himself had written in the *Spectateur Militaire*, in which he makes much the same assertions, and especially objects to the account of conversations with the Emperor after 1802, except always the one audience on taking leave for Hamburg. Meneval also says that Napoleon, when he wished to obtain intelligence from Hamburg, did not correspond with Bourrienne, but deputed him, Meneval, to ask Bourrienne for what was wanted. But he corroborates Bourrienne on the subject of the efforts made, among others by Josephine, for his reappointment.

Such are the statements of the Bonapartists pure; and the reader, as has been said, can judge for himself how far the attack is good. Bourrienne, or his editor, may well have confused the date of his interviews, but he will not be found much astray on many points. His account of the conversation of Josephine after the death of the Duc d'Eughien may be compared with what we know from Madame de Remusat, who, by the way, would have been horrified if she had known that he considered her to resemble the Empress Josephine in character.

We now come to the views of Savary, the Duc de Rovigo, who avowedly remained on good terms with Bourrienne after his disgrace, though the friendship of Savary was not exactly a thing that most men would have much prided themselves on. "Bourrienne had a prodigious memory; he spoke and wrote in several languages, and his pen ran as quickly as one could speak.

Nor were these the only advantages he possessed. He knew the routine of public business and public law. His activity and devotion made him indispensable to the First Consul. I knew the qualities which won for him the unlimited confidence of his chief, but I cannot speak with the same assurance of the faults which made him lose it. Bourrienne had many enemies, both on account of his character and of his place" (Savary, i. 418-19).

Marmont ought to be an impartial critic of the Memoirs. He says, "Bourrienne . . . had a very great capacity, but he is a striking example of the great truth that our passions are always bad counsellors. By inspiring us with an immoderate ardour to reach a fixed end, they often make us miss it. Bourrienne had an immoderate love of money. With his talents and his position near Bonaparte at the first dawn of greatness, with the confidence and real good-will which Bonaparte felt for him, in a few years he would have gained everything in fortune and in social position. But his eager impatience mined his career at the moment when it might have developed and increased" (Marmont, i. 64). The criticism appears just. As to the Memoirs, Marmont says (ii. 224), "In general, these Memoirs are of great veracity and powerful interest so long as they treat of what the author has seen and heard; but when he speaks of others, his work is only an assemblage of gratuitous suppositions and of false facts put forward for special purposes."

The Comte Alexandre de Puymaigre, who arrived at Hamburg soon after Bourrienne had left it in 1810, says (page 135) of

the part of the Memoirs which relates to Hamburg, "I must acknowledge that generally his assertions are well founded. This former companion of Napoleon has only forgotten to speak of the opinion that they had of him in this town.

"The truth is, that he was believed to have made much money there."

Thus we may take Bourrienne as a clever, able man, who would have risen to the highest honours under the Empire had not his short-sighted grasping after lucre driven him from office, and prevented him from ever regaining it under Napoleon.

In the present edition the translation has been carefully compared with the original French text. Where in the original text information is given which has now become mere matter of history, and where Bourrienne merely quotes the documents well enough known at this day, his possession of which forms part of the charges of his opponents, advantage has been taken to lighten the mass of the Memoirs. This has been done especially where they deal with what the writer did not himself see or hear, the part of the Memoirs which are of least value and of which Marmont's opinion has just been quoted. But in the personal and more valuable part of the Memoirs, where we have the actual knowledge of the secretary himself, the original text has been either fully retained, or some few passages previously omitted restored. Illustrative notes have been added from the Memoirs of the successor of Bourrienne, Meneval, Madame de Remusat, the works of Colonel Jung on 'Bonaparte et Son Temps', and

on 'Lucien Bonaparte', etc., and other books. Attention has also been paid to the attacks of the 'Erreurs', and wherever these criticisms are more than a mere expression of disagreement, their purport has been recorded with, where possible, some judgment of the evidence. Thus the reader will have before him the materials for deciding himself how far Bourrienne's statements are in agreement with the facts and with the accounts of other writers.

At the present time too much attention has been paid to the Memoirs of Madame de Remusat. She, as also Madame Junot, was the wife of a man on whom the full shower of imperial favours did not descend, and, womanlike, she saw and thought only of the Court life of the great man who was never less great than in his Court. She is equally astonished and indignant that the Emperor, coming straight from long hours of work with his ministers and with his secretary, could not find soft words for the ladies of the Court, and that, a horrible thing in the eyes of a Frenchwoman, when a mistress threw herself into his arms, he first thought of what political knowledge he could obtain from her. Bourrienne, on the other hand, shows us the other and the really important side of Napoleon's character. He tells us of the long hours in the Cabinet, of the never-resting activity of the Consul, of Napoleon's dreams, no ignoble dreams and often realised, of great labours of peace as well as of war. He is a witness, and the more valuable as a reluctant one, to the marvellous powers of the man who, if not the greatest, was at

least the one most fully endowed with every great quality of mind and body the world has ever seen.

R. W. P.

AUTHOR'S INTRODUCTION

The trading upon an illustrious name can alone have given birth to the multitude of publications under the titles of historical memoirs, secret memoirs, and other rhapsodies which have appeared respecting Napoleon. On looking into them it is difficult to determine whether the impudence of the writers or the simplicity of certain readers is most astonishing. Yet these rude and ill digested compilations, filled with absurd anecdotes, fabricated speeches, fictitious crimes or virtues, and disfigured by numerous anachronisms, instead of being consigned to just contempt and speedy oblivion, have been pushed into notice by speculators, and have found zealous partisans and enthusiastic apologists.

—[This Introduction has been reprinted as bearing upon the character of the work, but refers very often to events of the day at the time of its first appearance.]—

For a time I entertained the idea of noticing, one by one, the numerous errors which have been written respecting Napoleon; but I have renounced a task which would have been too laborious to myself, and very tedious to the reader. I shall therefore only correct those which come within the plan of my work, and which are connected with those facts, to a more accurate knowledge of which than any other person can possess I may lay claim.

There are men who imagine that nothing done by Napoleon will ever be forgotten; but must not the slow but inevitable influence of time be expected to operate with respect to him? The effect of that influence is, that the most important event of an epoch soon sinks, almost imperceptibly and almost disregarded, into the immense mass of historical facts. Time, in its progress, diminishes the probability as well as the interest of such an event, as it gradually wears away the most durable monuments.

I attach only a relative importance to what I am about to lay before the public. I shall give authentic documents. If all persons who have approached Napoleon, at any time and in any place, would candidly record what they saw and heard, without passion, the future historian would be rich in materials. It is my wish that he who may undertake the difficult task of writing the history of Napoleon shall find in my notes information useful to the perfection of his work. There he will at least find truth. I have not the ambition to wish that what I state should be taken as absolute authority; but I hope that it will always be consulted.

I have never before published anything respecting Napoleon. That malevolence which fastens itself upon men who have the misfortune to be somewhat separated from the crowd has, because there is always more profit in saying ill than good, attributed to me several works on Bonaparte; among others, '*Les Memoires secrets d'un Homme qui ne l'a pas quitté*', par M. B———, and '*Memoires secrets sur Napoleon Bonaparte*, par M. de B———, and '*Le Precis Historique sur Napoleon*'. The initial

of my name has served to propagate this error. The incredible ignorance which runs through those memoirs, the absurdities and inconceivable silliness with which they abound, do not permit a man of honour and common sense to allow such wretched rhapsodies to be imputed to him. I declared in 1816, and at later periods in the French and foreign journals, that I had no hand in those publications, and I here formally repeat this declaration.

But it may be said to me, Why should we place more confidence in you than in those who have written before you?

My reply shall be plain. I enter the lists one of the last. I have read all that my predecessors have published confident that all I state is true. I have no interest in deceiving, no disgrace to fear, no reward to expect. I neither wish to obscure nor embellish his glory. However great Napoleon may have been, was he not also liable to pay his tribute to the weakness of human nature? I speak of Napoleon such as I have seen him, known him, frequently admired and sometimes blamed him. I state what I saw, heard, wrote, and thought at the time, under each circumstance that occurred. I have not allowed myself to be carried away by the illusions of the imagination, nor to be influenced by friendship or hatred. I shall not insert a single reflection which did not occur to me at the very moment of the event which gave it birth. How many transactions and documents were there over which I could but lament!—how many measures, contrary to my views, to my principles, and to my character!—while the best intentions were incapable of overcoming difficulties which a most powerful and

decided will rendered almost insurmountable.

I also wish the future historian to compare what I say with what others have related or may relate. But it will be necessary for him to attend to dates, circumstances, difference of situation, change of temperament, and age,—for age has much influence over men. We do not think and act at fifty as at twenty-five. By exercising this caution he will be able to discover the truth, and to establish an opinion for posterity.

The reader must not expect to find in these Memoirs an uninterrupted series of all the events which marked the great career of Napoleon; nor details of all those battles, with the recital of which so many eminent men have usefully and ably occupied themselves. I shall say little about whatever I did not see or hear, and which is not supported by official documents.

Perhaps I shall succeed in confirming truths which have been doubted, and in correcting errors which have been adopted. If I sometimes differ from the observations and statements of Napoleon at St. Helena, I am far from supposing that those who undertook to be the medium of communication between him and the public have misrepresented what he said. I am well convinced that none of the writers of St. Helena can be taxed with the slightest deception; disinterested zeal and nobleness of character are undoubted pledges of their veracity. It appears to me perfectly certain that Napoleon stated, dictated, or corrected all they have published. Their honour is unquestionable; no one can doubt it. That they wrote what he communicated must

therefore be believed; but it cannot with equal confidence be credited that what he communicated was nothing but the truth. He seems often to have related as a fact what was really only an idea,—an idea, too, brought forth at St. Helena, the child of misfortune, and transported by his imagination to Europe in the time of his prosperity. His favourite phrase, which was every moment on his lips, must not be forgotten—"What will history say—what will posterity think?" This passion for leaving behind him a celebrated name is one which belongs to the constitution of the human mind; and with Napoleon its influence was excessive. In his first Italian campaign he wrote thus to General Clarke: "That ambition and the occupation of high offices were not sufficient for his satisfaction and happiness, which he had early placed in the opinion of Europe and the esteem of posterity." He often observed to me that with him the opinion of posterity was the real immortality of the soul.

It may easily be conceived that Napoleon wished to give to the documents which he knew historians would consult a favourable colour, and to direct, according to his own views, the judgment of posterity on his actions: But it is only by the impartial comparison of periods, positions, and age that a well founded decision will be given. About his fortieth year the physical constitution of Napoleon sustained considerable change; and it may be presumed that his moral qualities were affected by that change. It is particularly important not to lose sight of the premature decay of his health, which, perhaps, did not

permit him always to possess the vigour of memory otherwise consistent enough with his age. The state of our organisation often modifies our recollections, our feelings, our manner of viewing objects, and the impressions we receive. This will be taken into consideration by judicious and thinking men; and for them I write.

What M. de Las Casas states Napoleon to have said in May 1816 on the manner of writing his history corroborates the opinion I have expressed. It proves that all the facts and observations he communicated or dictated were meant to serve as materials. We learn from the Memorial that M. de Las Casas wrote daily, and that the manuscript was read over by Napoleon, who often made corrections with his own hand. The idea of a journal pleased him greatly. He fancied it would be a work of which the world could afford no other example. But there are passages in which the order of events is deranged; in others facts are misrepresented and erroneous assertions are made, I apprehend, not altogether involuntarily.

I have paid particular attention to all that has been published by the noble participators of the imperial captivity. Nothing, however, could induce me to change a word in these Memoirs, because nothing could take from me my conviction of the truth of what I personally heard and saw. It will be found that Napoleon in his private conversations often confirms what I state; but we sometimes differ, and the public must judge between us. However, I must here make one observation.

When Napoleon dictated or related to his friends in St. Helena the facts which they have reported he was out of the world,— he had played his part. Fortune, which, according to his notions, had conferred on him all his power and greatness, had recalled all her gifts before he sank into the tomb. His ruling passion would induce him to think that it was due to his glory to clear up certain facts which might prove an unfavourable escort if they accompanied him to posterity. This was his fixed idea. But is there not some ground for suspecting the fidelity of him who writes or dictates his own history? Why might he not impose on a few persons in St. Helena, when he was able to impose on France and Europe, respecting many acts which emanated from him during the long duration of his power? The life of Napoleon would be very unfaithfully written were the author to adopt as true all his bulletins and proclamations, and all the declarations he made at St. Helena. Such a history would frequently be in contradiction to facts; and such only is that which might be entitled, 'The History of Napoleon, written by Himself'.

I have said this much because it is my wish that the principles which have guided me in the composition of these Memoirs may be understood. I am aware that they will not please every reader; that is a success to which I cannot pretend. Some merit, however, may be allowed me on account of the labour I have undergone. It has neither been of a slight nor an agreeable kind. I made it a rule to read everything that has been written respecting Napoleon, and I have had to decipher many of his autograph documents,

though no longer so familiar with his scrawl as formerly. I say decipher, because a real cipher might often be much more readily understood than the handwriting of Napoleon. My own notes, too, which were often very hastily made, in the hand I wrote in my youth, have sometimes also much embarrassed me.

My long and intimate connection with Bonaparte from boyhood, my close relations with him when General, Consul, and Emperor, enabled me to see and appreciate all that was projected and all that was done during that considerable and momentous period of time. I not only had the opportunity of being present at the conception and the execution of the extraordinary deeds of one of the ablest men nature ever formed, but, notwithstanding an almost unceasing application to business, I found means to employ the few moments of leisure which Bonaparte left at my disposal in making notes, collecting documents, and in recording for history facts respecting which the truth could otherwise with difficulty be ascertained; and more particularly in collecting those ideas, often profound, brilliant, and striking, but always remarkable, to which Bonaparte gave expression in the overflowing frankness of confidential intimacy.

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