LOUIS DE BOURRIENNE

MEMOIRS OF NAPOLEON BONAPARTE — VOLUME 04

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Bourrienne L. A.

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Содержание

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CHAPTER XXVII

1799-1800.

Difficulties of a new Government—State of Europe—Bonaparte's wish for peace—M. de Talleyrand Minister for Foreign Affairs— Negotiations with England and Austria—Their failure—Bonaparte's views on the East—His sacrifices to policy—General Bonaparte denounced to the First Consul—Kléber's letter to the Directory— Accounts of the Egyptian expedition published in the Moniteur—Proclamation to the army of the East—Favour and disgrace of certain individuals accounted for.

When a new Government rises on the ruins of one that has been overthrown, its best chance of conciliating the favour of the nation, if that nation be at war, is to hold out the prospect of peace; for peace is always dear to a people. Bonaparte was well aware of this; and if in his heart he wished otherwise, he knew how important it was to seem to desire peace. Accordingly, immediately after his installation at the Luxembourg he notified to all the foreign powers his accession to the Consulate, and, for the same purpose, addressed letters to all the diplomatic agents of the French Government abroad.

The day after he got rid of his first two colleagues, Sieyès and Roger Ducos, he prepared to open negotiations with the Cabinet of London. At that time we were at war with almost the whole of Europe. We had also lost Italy. The Emperor of Germany was ruled by his Ministers, who in their turn were governed by England. It was no easy matter to manage equally the organization of the Consular Government and the no less important affairs abroad; and it was very important to the interests of the First Consul to intimate to foreign powers, while at the same time he assured himself against the return of the Bourbons, that the system which he proposed to adopt was a system of order and regeneration, unlike either the demagogic violence of the Convention or the imbecile artifice of the Directory. In fulfilment of this object Bonaparte directed M. de Talleyrand, the new Minister for Foreign Affairs, to make the first friendly overtures to the English Cabinet: A correspondence ensued, which was published at the time, and which showed at once the conciliatory policy of Bonaparte and the arrogant policy of England.

The exchange of notes which took place was attended by no immediate result. However, the First Consul had partly attained his object: if the British Government would not enter into negotiations for peace, there was at least reason to presume that subsequent overtures of the Consular Government might be listened to. The correspondence had at all events afforded Bonaparte the opportunity of declaring his principles, and above all, it had enabled him to ascertain that the return of the Bourbons to France (mentioned in the official reply of Lord Grenville) would not be a sine qua non condition for the restoration of peace between the two powers.

Since M. de Talleyrand had been Minister for Foreign Affairs the business of that department had proceeded with great activity. It was an important advantage to Bonaparte to find a nobleman of the old regime among the republicans. The choice of M. de Talleyrand was in some sort an act of courtesy to the foreign Courts. It was a delicate attention to the diplomacy of Europe to introduce to its members, for the purpose of treating with them, a man whose rank was at least equal to their own, and who was universally distinguished for a polished elegance of manner combined with solid good qualities and real talents.

It was not only with England that Bonaparte and his Minister endeavoured to open negotiations; the Consular Cabinet also offered peace to the House of Austria; but not at the same time. The object of this offer was to sow discord between the two powers. Speaking to me one day of his earnest wish to obtain peace Bonaparte said, "You see, Bourrienne, I have two great enemies to cope with. I will conclude peace with the one I find most easy to deal with. That will enable me immediately to assail the other. I frankly confess that I should like best to be at peace with England. Nothing would then be more easy than to crush Austria. She has no money except what she gets through England."

For a long time all negotiations proved abortive. None of the European powers would acknowledge the new Government, of which Bonaparte was the head; and the battle of Marengo was required before the peace of Amiens could be obtained.

Though the affairs of the new Government afforded abundant occupation to Bonaparte, he yet found leisure to direct attention to the East—to that land of despotism whence, judging from his subsequent conduct, it might be presumed he derived his first principles of government. On becoming the head of the State he wished to turn Egypt, which he had conquered as a general, to the advantage of his policy as Consul. If Bonaparte triumphed over a feeling of dislike in consigning the command of the army to Kléber, it was because he knew Kléber to be more capable than any other of executing the plans he had formed; and Bonaparte was not the man to sacrifice the interests of policy to personal resentment. It is certainly true that he then put into practice that charming phrase of Molière's—"I pardon you, but you shall pay me for this!"

With respect to all whom he had left in Egypt Bonaparte stood in a very singular situation. On becoming Chief of the Government he was not only the depositary of all communications made to the Directory; but letters sent to one address were delivered to another, and the First Consul received the complaints made against the General who had so abruptly quitted Egypt. In almost all the letters that were delivered to us he was the object of serious accusation. According to some he had not avowed his departure until the very day of his embarkation; and he had deceived everybody by means of false and dissembling proclamations. Others canvassed his conduct while in Egypt: the army which had triumphed under his command he had abandoned when reduced to two-thirds of its original force and a prey to all the horrors of sickness and want. It must be confessed that these complaints and accusations were but too well founded, and one can never cease wondering at the chain of fortunate circumstances which so rapidly raised Bonaparte to the Consular seat. In the natural order of things, and in fulfilment of the design which he himself had formed, he should have disembarked at Toulon, where the quarantine laws would no doubt have been observed; instead of which, the fear of the English and the uncertainty of the pilots caused him to go to Fréjus, where the quarantine laws were violated by the very persons most interested in respecting them. Let us suppose that Bonaparte had been forced to perform quarantine at Toulon. What would have ensued? The charges against him would have fallen into the hands of the Directory, and he would probably have been suspended, and put upon his trial.

Among the letters which fell into Bonaparte's hands, by reason of the abrupt change of government, was an official despatch (of the 4th Vendemiaire, year VIII.) from General Kléber at Cairo to the Executive Directory, in which that general spoke in very stringent terms of the sudden departure of Bonaparte and of the state in which the army in Egypt had been left. General Kléber further accused him of having evaded, by his flight, the difficulties which he thus transferred to his successor's shoulders, and also of leaving the army "without a sou in the chest," with pay in arrear, and very little supply of munitions or clothing.

The other letters from Egypt were not less accusatory than Kléber's; and it cannot be doubted that charges of so precise a nature, brought by the general who had now become commander-in-chief against his predecessor, would have had great weight, especially backed as they were by similar complaints from other quarters. A trial would have been inevitable; and then, no 18th Brumaire, no Consulate, no Empire, no conquest of Europe- but also, it may be added, no St. Helena. None of

these events would have ensued had not the English squadron, when it appeared off Corsica, obliged the Muiron to scud about at hazard, and to touch at the first land she could reach.

The Egyptian expedition filled too important a place in the life of Bonaparte for him to neglect frequently reviving in the public mind the recollection of his conquests in the East. It was not to be forgotten that the head of the Republic was the first of her generals. While Moreau received the command of the armies of the Rhine, while Massena, as a reward for the victory of Zurich, was made Commander-in-Chief in Italy, and while Brune was at the head of the army of Batavia, Bonaparte, whose soul was in the camps, consoled himself for his temporary inactivity by a retrospective glance on his past triumphs. He was unwilling that Fame should for a moment cease to blazon his name. Accordingly, as soon as he was established at the head of the Government, he caused accounts of his Egyptian expedition to be from time to time published in the Moniteur. He frequently expressed his satisfaction that the accusatory correspondence, and, above all, Kléber's letter, had fallen into his own hands. Such was Bonaparte's perfect self-command that immediately after perusing that letter he dictated to me the following proclamation, addressed to the army of the East:

> SOLDIERS!—The Consuls of the French Republic frequently direct their attention to the army of the East.
>
> France acknowledges all the influence of your conquests on the restoration of her trade and the civilisation of the world.
>
> The eyes of all Europe are upon you, and in thought I am often with you.
>
> In whatever situation the chances of war may place you, prove yourselves still the soldiers of Rivoli and Aboukir—you will be invincible.
>
> Place in Kléber the boundless confidence which you reposed in me.
>
> He deserves it.
>
> Soldiers, think of the day when you will return victorious to the sacred territory of France. That will be a glorious day for the whole nation.

Nothing can more forcibly show the character of Bonaparte than the above allusion to Kléber, after he had seen the way in which Kléber spoke of him to the Directory. Could it ever have been imagined that the correspondence of the army, to whom he addressed this proclamation, teemed with accusations against him? Though the majority of these accusations were strictly just, yet it is but fair to state that the letters from Egypt contained some calumnies. In answer to the well- founded portion of the charges Bonaparte said little; but he seemed to feel deeply the falsehoods that were stated against him, one of which was, that he had carried away millions from Egypt. I cannot conceive what could have given rise to this false and impudent assertion. So far from having touched the army chest, Bonaparte had not even received all his own pay. Before he constituted himself the Government the Government was his debtor.

Though he knew well all that was to be expected from the Egyptian expedition, yet those who lauded that affair were regarded with a favourable eye by Bonaparte. The correspondence which had fallen into his hands was to him of the highest importance in enabling him to ascertain the opinions which particular individuals entertained of him.

It was the source of favours and disgraces which those who were not in the secret could not account for. It serves to explain why many men of mediocrity were elevated to the highest dignities and honours, while other men of real merit fell into disgrace or were utterly neglected.

CHAPTER XXVIII

1800.

Great and common men—Portrait of Bonaparte—The varied expression of his countenance—His convulsive shrug—Presentiment of his corpulency—Partiality for bathing—His temperance—His alleged capability of dispensing with sleep—Good and bad news—Shaving, and reading the journals—Morning business —Breakfast—Coffee and snuff —Bonaparte's idea of his own situation—His ill opinion of mankind —His dislike of a 'tête-à-tête'—His hatred of the Revolutionists —Ladies in white—Anecdotes—Bonaparte's tokens of kindness, and his droll compliments—His fits of ill humour—Sound of bells— Gardens of Malmaison —His opinion of medicine—His memory— His poetic insensibility—His want of gallantry—Cards and conversation—The dress-coat and black cravat—Bonaparte's payments —His religious ideas—His obstinacy.

In perusing the history of the distinguished characters of past ages, how often do we regret that the historian should have portrayed the hero rather than the man! We wish to know even the most trivial habits of those whom great talents and vast reputation have elevated above their fellow-creatures. Is this the effect of mere curiosity, or rather is it not an involuntary feeling of vanity which prompts us to console ourselves for the superiority of great men by reflecting on their faults, their weaknesses, their absurdities; in short, all the points of resemblance between them and common men? For the satisfaction of those who are curious in details of this sort, I will here endeavour to paint Bonaparte, as I saw him, in person and in mind, to describe what were his tastes and habits, and even his whims and caprices.

Bonaparte was now in the prime of life, and about thirty. The person of Bonaparte has served as a model for the most skilful painters and sculptors; many able French artists have successfully delineated his features, and yet it may be said that no perfectly faithful portrait of him exists. His finely-shaped head, his superb forehead, his pale countenance, and his usual meditative look, have been transferred to the canvas; but the versatility of his expression was beyond the reach of imitation. All the various workings of his mind were instantaneously depicted in his countenance; and his glance changed from mild to severe, and from angry to good-humoured, almost with the rapidity of lightning. It may truly be said that he had a particular look for every thought that arose in his mind.

Bonaparte had beautiful hands, and he was very proud of them; while conversing he would often look at them with an air of self-complacency. He also fancied he had fine teeth, but his pretension to that advantage was not so well founded as his vanity on the score of his hands.

When walking, either alone or in company with any one, in his apartments or in his gardens, he had the habit of stooping a little, and crossing his hands behind his back. He frequently gave an involuntary shrug of his right shoulder, which was accompanied by a movement of his mouth from left to right. This habit was always most remarkable when his mind was absorbed in the consideration of any profound subject. It was often while walking that he dictated to me his most important notes. He could endure great fatigue, not only on horseback but on foot; he would sometimes walk for five or six hours in succession without being aware of it.

When walking with any person whom he treated with familiarity he would link his arm into that of his companion, and lean on it.

He used often to say to me, "You see, Bourrienne, how temperate, and how thin I am; but, in spite of that, I cannot help thinking that at forty I shall become a great eater, and get very fat. I foresee that my constitution will undergo a change. I take a great deal of exercise; but yet I feel assured that my presentiment will be fulfilled." This idea gave him great uneasiness, and as I observed nothing

which seemed to warrant his apprehensions, I omitted no opportunity of assuring him that they were groundless. But he would not listen to me, and all the time I was about him, he was haunted by this presentiment, which, in the end, was but too well verified.

His partiality for the bath he mistook for a necessity. He would usually remain in the bath two hours, during which time I used to read to him extracts from the journals and pamphlets of the day, for he was anxious to hear and know all that was going on. While in the bath he was continually turning on the warm water to raise the temperature, so that I was sometimes enveloped in such a dense vapour that I could not see to read, and was obliged to open the door.

Bonaparte was exceedingly temperate, and averse to all excess. He knew the absurd stories that were circulated about him, and he was sometimes vexed at them. It has been repeated, over and over again, that he was subject to attacks of epilepsy; but during the eleven years that I was almost constantly with him I never observed any symptom which in the least degree denoted that malady. His health was good and his constitution sound. If his enemies, by way of reproach, have attributed to him a serious periodical disease, his flatterers, probably under the idea that sleep is incompatible with greatness, have evinced an equal disregard of truth in speaking of his night-watching. Bonaparte made others watch, but he himself slept, and slept well. His orders were that I should call him every morning at seven. I was therefore the first to enter his chamber; but very frequently when I awoke him he would turn himself, and say, "Ah, Bourrienne! let me lie a little longer." When there was no very pressing business I did not disturb him again till eight o'clock. He in general slept seven hours out of the twenty-four, besides taking a short nap in the afternoon.

Among the private instructions which Bonaparte gave me, one was very curious. "During the night," said he, "enter my chamber as seldom as possible. Do not awake me when you have any good news to communicate: with that there is no hurry. But when you bring bad news, rouse me instantly; for then there is not a moment to be lost."

This was a wise regulation, and Bonaparte found his advantage in it.

As soon as he rose his 'valet de chambre' shaved him and dressed his hair. While he was being shaved I read to him the newspapers, beginning always with the 'Moniteur.' He paid little attention to any but the German and English papers. "Pass over all that," he would say, while I was perusing the French papers; "I know it already. They say only what they think will please me." I was often surprised that his valet did not cut him while I was reading; for whenever he heard anything interesting he turned quickly round towards me.

When Bonaparte had finished his toilet, which he did with great attention, for he was scrupulously neat in his person, we went down to his cabinet. There he signed the orders on important petitions which had been analysed by me on the preceding evening. On reception and parade days he was particularly exact in signing these orders, because I used to remind him that he would be likely to see most of the petitioners, and that they would ask him for answers. To spare him this annoyance I used often to acquaint them beforehand of what had been granted or refused, and what had been the decision of the First Consul. He next perused the letters which I had opened and laid on his table, ranging them according to their importance. He directed me to answer them in his name; he occasionally wrote the answers himself, but not often.

At ten o'clock the 'maître d'hôtel' entered, and announced breakfast, saying, "The General is served." We went to breakfast, and the repast was exceedingly simple. He ate almost every morning some chicken, dressed with oil and onions. This dish was then, I believe, called 'poulet à la Provençale'; but our restaurateurs have since conferred upon it the more ambitious name of 'poulet à la Marengo.'

Bonaparte drank little wine, always either claret or Burgundy, and the latter by preference. After breakfast, as well as after dinner, he took a cup of strong coffee.

—[M. Brillat de Savarin, whose memory is dear to all gourmands, had established, as a gastronomic principle, that "he who does not take coffee after each meal is assuredly not a man of taste."— Bourrienne.]—

I never saw him take any between his meals, and I cannot imagine what could have given rise to the assertion of his being particularly fond of coffee. When he worked late at night he never ordered coffee, but chocolate, of which he made me take a cup with him. But this only happened when our business was prolonged till two or three in the morning.

All that has been said about Bonaparte's immoderate use of snuff has no more foundation in truth than his pretended partiality for coffee. It is true that at an early period of his life he began to take snuff, but it was very sparingly, and always out of a box; and if he bore any resemblance to Frederick the Great, it was not by filling his waistcoat- pockets with snuff, for I must again observe he carried his notions of personal neatness to a fastidious degree.

Bonaparte had two ruling passions, glory and war. He was never more gay than in the camp, and never more morose than in the inactivity of peace. Plans for the construction of public monuments also pleased his imagination, and filled up the void caused by the want of active occupation. He was aware that monuments form part of the history of nations, of whose civilisation they bear evidence for ages after those who created them have disappeared from the earth, and that they likewise often bear false-witness to remote posterity of the reality of merely fabulous conquests. Bonaparte was, however, mistaken as to the mode of accomplishing the object he had in view. His ciphers, his trophies, and subsequently his eagles, splendidly adorned the monuments of his reign. But why did he wish to stamp false initials on things with which neither he nor his reign had any connection; as, for example the old Louvre? Did he imagine that the letter, "N" which everywhere obtruded itself on the eye, had in it a charm to controvert the records of history, or alter the course of time?

—[When Louis XVIII. returned to the Tuileries in 1814 he found that Bonaparte had been an excellent tenant, and that he had left everything in very good condition.]—

Be this as it may, Bonaparte well knew that the fine arts entail lasting glory on great actions, and consecrate the memory of princes who protect and encourage them. He oftener than once said to me, "A great reputation is a great noise; the more there is made, the farther off it is heard. Laws, institutions, monuments, nations, all fall; but the noise continues and resounds in after ages." This was one of his favourite ideas. "My power," he would say at other times, "depends on my glory, and my glory on my victories. My power would fall were I not to support it by new glory and new victories. Conquest has made me what I am, and conquest alone can maintain me." This was then, and probably always continued to be, his predominant idea, and that which prompted him continually to scatter the seeds of war through Europe. He thought that if he remained stationary he would fall, and he was tormented with the desire of continually advancing. Not to do something great and decided was, in his opinion, to do nothing. "A newly-born Government," said he to me, "must dazzle and astonish. When it ceases to do that it falls." It was vain to look for rest from a man who was restlessness itself.

His sentiments towards France now differed widely from what I had known them to be in his youth. He long indignantly cherished the recollection of the conquest of Corsica, which he was once content to regard as his country. But that recollection was effaced, and it might be said that he now ardently loved France. His imagination was fired by the very thought of seeing her great, happy, and powerful, and, as the first nation in the world, dictating laws to the rest. He fancied his name inseparably connected with France, and resounding in the ears of posterity. In all his actions he lost sight of the present moment, and thought only of futurity; so, in all places where he led the way to glory, the opinion of France was ever present in his thoughts. As Alexander at Arbela pleased himself less in having conquered Darius than in having gained the suffrage of the Athenians, so Bonaparte at Marengo was haunted by the idea of what would be said in France. Before he fought a battle

Bonaparte thought little about what he should do in case of success, but a great deal about what he should do in case of a reverse of fortune. I mention this as a fact of which I have often been a witness, and leave to his brothers in arms to decide whether his calculations were always correct. He had it in his power to do much, for he risked everything and spared nothing. His inordinate ambition goaded him on to the attainment of power; and power when possessed served only to augment his ambition. Bonaparte was thoroughly convinced of the truth that trifles often decide the greatest events; therefore he watched rather than provoked opportunity, and when the right moment approached, he suddenly took advantage of it. It is curious that, amidst all the anxieties of war and government, the fear of the Bourbons incessantly pursued him, and the Faubourg St. Germain was to him always a threatening phantom.

He did not esteem mankind, whom, indeed, he despised more and more in proportion as he became acquainted with them. In him this unfavourable opinion of human nature was justified by many glaring examples of baseness, and he used frequently to repeat, "There are two levers for moving men,—interest and fear." What respect, indeed, could Bonaparte entertain for the applicants to the treasury of the opera? Into this treasury the gaming-houses paid a considerable sum, part of which went to cover the expenses of that magnificent theatre. The rest was distributed in secret gratuities, which were paid on orders signed by Duroc. Individuals of very different characters were often seen catching the little door in the Rue Rameau. The lady who was for a while the favourite of the General-in-Chief in Egypt, and whose husband was maliciously sent back by the English, was a frequent visitor to the treasury. On an occasion would be seen assembled there a distinguished scholar and an actor, a celebrated orator and a musician; on another, the treasurer would have payments to make to a priest, a courtesan, and a cardinal.

One of Bonaparte's greatest misfortunes was, that he neither believed in friendship not felt the necessity of loving. How often have I heard him say, "Friendship is but a name; I love nobody. I do not even love my brothers. Perhaps Joseph, a little, from habit and because he is my elder; and Duroc, I love him too. But why? Because his character pleases me. He is stern and resolute; and I really believe the fellow never shed a tear. For my part, I know very well that I have no true friends. As long as I continue what I am, I may have as many pretended friends as I please. Leave sensibility to women; it is their business. But men should be firm in heart and in purpose, or they should have nothing to do with war or government."

In his social relations Bonaparte's temper was bad; but his fits of ill- humour passed away like a cloud, and spent themselves in words. His violent language and bitter imprecations were frequently premeditated. When he was going to reprimand any one he liked to have a witness present. He would then say the harshest things, and level blows against which few could bear up. But he never gave way to those violent ebullitions of rage until be acquired undoubted proofs of the misconduct of those against whom they were directed. In scenes of this sort I have frequently observed that the presence of a third person seemed to give him confidence. Consequently, in a 'tête-à-tête' interview, any one who knew his character, and who could maintain sufficient coolness and firmness, was sure to get the better of him. He told his friends at St. Helena that he admitted a third person on such occasions only that the blow might resound the farther. That was not his real motive, or the better way would have been to perform the scene in public. He had other reasons. I observed that he did not like a 'tête-à-tête'; and when he expected any one, he would say to me beforehand, "Bourrienne, you may remain;" and when any one was announced whom he did not expect, as a minister or a general, if I rose to retire he would say in a half- whisper, "Stay where you are." Certainly this was not done with the design of getting what he said reported abroad; for it belonged neither to my character nor my duty to gossip about what I had heard. Besides, it may be presumed, that the few who were admitted as witnesses to the conferences of Napoleon were aware of the consequences attending indiscreet disclosures under a Government which was made acquainted with all that was said and done.

Bonaparte entertained a profound dislike of the sanguinary men of the Revolution, and especially of the regicides. He felt, as a painful burden, the obligation of dissembling towards them. He spoke to me in terms of horror of those whole he called the assassins of Louis XVI, and he was annoyed at the necessity of employing them and treating them with apparent respect. How many times has he not said to Cambacérès, pinching him by the ear, to soften, by that habitual familiarity, the bitterness of the remark, "My dear fellow, your case is clear; if ever the Bourbons come back you will be hanged!" A forced smile would then relax the livid countenance of Cambacérès, and was usually the only reply of the Second Consul, who, however, on one occasion said in my hearing, "Come, come, have done with this joking."

One thing which gave Bonaparte great pleasure when in the country was to see a tall, slender woman, dressed in white, walking beneath an alley of shaded trees. He detested coloured dresses, and especially dark ones. To fat women he had an invincible antipathy, and he could not endure the sight of a pregnant woman; it therefore rarely happened that a female in that situation was invited to his parties. He possessed every requisite for being what is called in society an agreeable man, except the will to be so. His manner was imposing rather than pleasing, and those who did not know him well experienced in his presence an involuntary feeling of awe. In the drawing-room, where Josephine did the honours with so much grace and affability, all was gaiety and ease, and no one felt the presence of a superior; but on Bonaparte's entrance all was changed, and every eye was directed towards him, to read his humour in his countenance, whether he intended to be silent or talkative, dull or cheerful.

He often talked a great deal, and sometimes a little too much; but no one could tell a story in a more agreeable and interesting way. His conversation rarely turned on gay or humorous subjects, and never on trivial matters. He was so fond of argument that in the warmth of discussion it was easy to draw from him secrets which he was most anxious to conceal. Sometimes, in a small circle, he would amuse himself by relating stories of presentiments and apparitions. For this he always chose the twilight of evening, and he would prepare his hearers for what was coming by some solemn remark. On one occasion of this kind he said, in a very grave tone of voice, "When death strikes a person whom we love, and who is distant from us, a foreboding almost always denotes the event, and the dying person appears to us at the moment of his dissolution." He then immediately related the following anecdote: "A gentleman of the Court of Louis XIV. was in the gallery of Versailles at the time that the King was reading to his courtiers the bulletin of the battle of Friedlingen gained by Villars. Suddenly the gentleman saw, at the farther end of the gallery, the ghost of his son, who served under Villars. He exclaimed, 'My son is no more!' and next moment the King named him among the dead."

When travelling Bonaparte was particularly talkative. In the warmth of his conversation, which was always characterised by original and interesting ideas, he sometimes dropped hints of his future views, or, at least, he said things which were calculated to disclose what he wished to conceal. I took the liberty of mentioning to him this indiscretion, and far from being offended, he acknowledged his mistake, adding that he was not aware he had gone so far. He frankly avowed this want of caution when at St. Helena.

When in good humour his usual tokens of kindness consisted in a little rap on the head or a slight pinch of the ear. In his most friendly conversations with those whom he admitted into his intimacy he would say, "You are a fool"—"a simpleton"—"a ninny"—"a blockhead." These, and a few other words of like import, enabled him to vary his catalogue of compliments; but he never employed them angrily, and the tone in which they were uttered sufficiently indicated that they were meant in kindness.

Bonaparte had many singular habits and tastes. Whenever he experienced any vexation, or when any unpleasant thought occupied his mind, he would hum something which was far from resembling a tune, for his voice was very unmusical. He would, at the same time, seat himself before the writing-table, and swing back in his chair so far that I have often been fearful of his falling.

He would then vent his ill-humour on the right arm of his chair, mutilating it with his penknife, which he seemed to keep for no other purpose. I always took care to keep good pens ready for him; for, as it was my business to decipher his writing, I had a strong interest in doing what I could to make it legible.

The sound of bells always produced in Bonaparte pleasurable sensations, which I could never account for. When we were at Malmaison, and walking in the alley leading to the plain of Ruel, how many times has the bell of the village church interrupted our most serious conversations!

He would stop, lest the noise of our footsteps should drown any portion of the delightful sound. He was almost angry with me because I did not experience the impressions he did. So powerful was the effect produced upon him by the sound of these bells that his voice would falter as he said, "Ah! that reminds me of the first years I spent at Brienne! I was then happy!" When the bells ceased he would resume the course of his speculations, carry himself into futurity, place a crown on his head, and dethrone kings.

Nowhere, except on the field of battle, did I ever see Bonaparte more happy than in the gardens of Malmaison. At the commencement of the Consulate we used to go there every Saturday evening, and stay the whole of Sunday, and sometimes Monday. Bonaparte used to spend a considerable part of his time in walking and superintending the improvements which he had ordered. At first he used to make excursions about the neighbourhood, but the reports of the police disturbed his natural confidence, and gave him reason to fear the attempts of concealed royalist partisans.

During the first four or five days that Bonaparte spent at Malmaison he amused himself after breakfast with calculating the revenue of that domain. According to his estimates it amounted to 8000 francs. "That is not bad!" said he; "but to live here would require an income of 30,000 livres!" I could not help smiling to see him seriously engaged in such a calculation.

Bonaparte had no faith in medicine. He spoke of it as an art entirely conjectural, and his opinion on this subject was fired and incontrovertible. His vigorous mind rejected all but demonstrative proofs.

He had little memory for proper names, words, or dates, but he had a wonderful recollection of facts and places. I recollect that, on going from Paris to Toulon, he pointed out to me ten places calculated for great battles, and he never forgot them. They were memoranda of his first youthful journeys.

Bonaparte was insensible to the charms of poetic harmony. He had not even sufficient ear to feel the rhythm of poetry, and he never could recite a verse without violating the metre; yet the grand ideas of poetry charmed him. He absolutely worshipped Corneille; and, one day, after having witnessed a performance of 'Cinna', he said to me, "If a man like Corneille were living in my time I would make him my Prime Minister. It is not his poetry that I most admire; it is his powerful understanding, his vast knowledge of the human heart, and his profound policy!" At St. Helena he said that he would have made Corneille a prince; but at the time he spoke to me of Corneille he had no thought of making either princes or kings.

Gallantry to women was by no means a trait in Bonaparte's character. He seldom said anything agreeable to females, and he frequently addressed to them the rudest and most extraordinary remarks. To one he would say, "Heavens, how red your elbows are!" To another, "What an ugly headdress you have got!" At another time he would say, "Your dress is none of the cleanest….. Do you ever change your gown? I have seen you in that twenty times!" He showed no mercy to any who displeased him on these points. He often gave Josephine directions about her toilet, and the exquisite taste for which she was distinguished might have helped to make him fastidious about the costume of other ladies. At first he looked to elegance above all things: at a later period he admired luxury and splendour, but he always required modesty. He frequently expressed his disapproval of the low-necked dresses which were so much in fashion at the beginning of the Consulate.

Bonaparte did not love cards, and this was very fortunate for those who were invited to his parties; for when he was seated at a card-table, as he sometimes thought himself obliged to be, nothing

could exceed the dulness of the drawing-room either at the Luxembourg or the Tuileries. When, on the contrary, he walked about among the company, all were pleased, for he usually spoke to everybody, though he preferred the conversation of men of science, especially those who had been with him in in Egypt; as for example, Monge and Berthollet. He also liked to talk with Chaptal and Lacépède, and with Lemercier, the author of 'Agamemnon'.

Bonaparte was seen to less advantage in a drawing-room than at the head of his troops. His military uniform became him much better than the handsomest dress of any other kind. His first trials of dress-coats were unfortunate. I have been informed that the first time he wore one he kept on his black cravat. This incongruity was remarked to him, and he replied, "So much the better; it leaves me something of a military air, and there is no harm in that." For my own part, I neither saw the black cravat nor heard this reply.

The First Consul paid his own private bills very punctually; but he was always tardy in settling the accounts of the contractors who bargained with Ministers for supplies for the public service. He put off these payments by all sorts of excuses and shufflings. Hence arose immense arrears in the expenditure, and the necessity of appointing a committee of liquidation. In his opinion the terms contractor and rogue were synonymous. All that he avoided paying them he regarded as a just restitution to himself; and all the sums which were struck off from their accounts he regarded as so much deducted from a theft. The less a Minister paid out of his budget the more Bonaparte was pleased with him; and this ruinous system of economy can alone explain the credit which Decrès so long enjoyed at the expense of the French navy.

On the subject of religion Bonaparte's ideas were very vague. "My reason," said he, "makes me incredulous respecting many things; but the impressions of my childhood and early youth throw me into uncertainty." He was very fond of talking of religion. In Italy, in Egypt, and on board the 'Orient' and the 'Muiron', I have known him to take part in very animated conversations on this subject.

He readily yielded up all that was proved against religion as the work of men and time: but he would not hear of materialism. I recollect that one fine night, when he was on deck with some persons who were arguing in favour of materialism, Bonaparte raised his hand to heaven and, pointing to the stars, said, "You may talk as long as you please, gentlemen, but who made all that?" The perpetuity of a name in the memory of man was to him the immortality of the soul. He was perfectly tolerant towards every variety of religious faith.

Among Bonaparte's singular habits was that of seating himself on any table which happened to be of a suitable height for him. He would often sit on mine, resting his left arm on my right shoulder, and swinging his left leg, which did not reach the ground; and while he dictated to me he would jolt the table so that I could scarcely write.

Bonaparte had a great dislike to reconsider any decision, even when it was acknowledged to be unjust. In little as well as in great things he evinced his repugnance to retrograde. An instance of this occurred in the affair of General Latour-Foissac. The First Consul felt how much he had wronged that general; but he wished some time to elapse before he repaired his error. His heart and his conduct were at variance; but his feelings were overcome by what he conceived to be political necessity. Bonaparte was never known to say, "I have done wrong:" his usual observation was, "I begin to think there is something wrong."

In spite of this sort of feeling, which was more worthy of an ill- humoured philosopher than the head of a government, Bonaparte was neither malignant nor vindictive. I cannot certainly defend him against all the reproaches which he incurred through the imperious law of war and cruel necessity; but I may say that he has often been unjustly accused. None but those who are blinded by fury will call him a Nero or a Caligula. I think I have avowed his faults with sufficient candour to entitle me to credit when I speak in his commendation; and I declare that, out of the field of battle, Bonaparte had a kind and feeling heart. He was very fond of children, a trait which seldom distinguishes a bad man. In the relations of private life to call him amiable would not be using too strong a word, and he was

very indulgent to the weakness of human nature. The contrary opinion is too firmly fixed in some minds for me to hope to root it out. I shall, I fear, have contradictors, but I address myself to those who look for truth. To judge impartially we must take into account the influence which time and circumstances exercise on men; and distinguish between the different characters of the Collegian, the General, the Consul, and the Emperor.

CHAPTER XXIX

1800.

Bonaparte's laws—Suppression of the festival of the 21st of January—Officials visits—The Temple—Louis XVI. and Sir Sidney Smith—Peculation during the Directory—Loan raised—Modest budget —The Consul and the Member of the Institute—The figure of the Republic—Duroc's missions—The King of Prussia—The Emperor Alexander—General Latour-Foissac—Arbitrary decree—Company of players for Egypt—Singular ideas respecting literary property— The preparatory Consulate—The journals—Sabres and muskets of honour—The First Consul and his Comrade—The bust of Brutus— Statues in the gallery of the Tuileries—Sections of the Council of State—Costumes of public functionaries—Masquerades—The operaballs—Recall of the exiles.

It is not my purpose to say much about the laws, decrees, and 'Senatus- Consultes', which the First Consul either passed, or caused to be passed, after his accession to power, what were they all, with the exception of the Civil Code? The legislative reveries of the different men who have from time to time ruled France form an immense labyrinth, in which chicanery bewilders reason and common sense; and they would long since have been buried in oblivion had they not occasionally served to authorise injustice. I cannot, however, pass over unnoticed the happy effect produced in Paris, and throughout the whole of France, by some of the first decisions of the Consuls. Perhaps none but those who witnessed the state of society during the reign of Terror can fully appreciate the satisfaction which the first steps towards the restoration of social order produced in the breasts of all honest men. The Directory, more base and not less perverse than the Convention, had retained the horrible 21st of January among the festivals of the Republic. One of Bonaparte's first ideas on attaining the possession of power was to abolish this; but such was the ascendency of the abettors of the fearful event that he could not venture on a straightforward course. He and his two colleagues, who were Sieyès and Roger Ducos, signed, on the 5th Nivôse, a decree, setting forth that in future the only festivals to be celebrated by the Republic were the 1st Vendemiaire and the 14th of July, intending by this means to consecrate provisionally the recollection of the foundation of the Republic and of liberty.

All was calculation with Bonaparte. To produce effect was his highest gratification. Thus he let slip no opportunity of saying or doing things which were calculated to dazzle the multitude. While at the Luxembourg, he went sometimes accompanied by his 'aides de camp' and sometimes by a Minister, to pay certain official visits. I did not accompany him on these occasions; but almost always either on his return, after dinner, or in the evening, he related to me what he had done and said. He congratulated himself on having paid a visit to Daubenton, at the Jardin des Plantes, and talked with great self-complacency of the distinguished way in which he had treated the contemporary of Buffon.

On the 24th Brumaire he visited the prisons. He liked to make these visits unexpectedly, and to take the governors of the different public establishments by surprise; so that, having no time to make their preparations, he might see things as they really were. I was in his cabinet when he returned, for I had a great deal of business to go through in his absence. As he entered he exclaimed, "What brutes these Directors are! To what a state they have brought our public establishments! But, stay a little! I will put all in order. The prisons are in a shockingly unwholesome state, and the prisoners miserably fed. I questioned them, and I questioned the jailers, for nothing is to be learned from the superiors. They, of course, always speak well of their own work! When I was in the Temple I could not help thinking of the unfortunate Louis XVI. He was an excellent man, but too amiable, too gentle for the times. He knew not how to deal with mankind! And Sir Sidney Smith! I made them show me his apartment. If the fools had not let him escape I should have taken St. Jean d'Acre!

There are too many painful recollections connected with that prison! I will certainly have it pulled down some day or other! What do you think I did at the Temple? I ordered the jailers' books to be brought to me, and finding that some hostages were still in confinement I liberated them. 'An unjust law,' said I, 'has deprived you of liberty; my first duty is to restore it to you.' Was not this well done, Bourrienne? "As I was, no less than Bonaparte himself, an enemy to the revolutionary laws, I congratulated him sincerely; and he was very sensible to my approbation, for I was not accustomed to greet him with "Good; very good," on all occasions. It is true, knowing his character as I did, I avoided saying anything that was calculated to offend him; but when I said nothing, he knew very well how to construe my silence. Had I flattered him I should have continued longer in favour.

Bonaparte always spoke angrily of the Directors he had turned off. Their incapacity disgusted and astonished him. "What simpletons! what a government!" he would frequently exclaim when he looked into the measures of the Directory. "Bourrienne," said he, "can you imagine anything more pitiable than their system of finance? Can it for a moment be doubted that the principal agents of authority daily committed the most fraudulent peculations? What venality! what disorder! what wastefulness! everything put up for sale: places, provisions, clothing, and military, all were disposed of. Have they not actually consumed 75,000,000 in advance? And then, think of all the scandalous fortunes accumulated, all the malversations! But are there no means of making them refund? We shall see."

In these first moments of poverty it was found necessary to raise a loan, for the funds of M. Collot did not last long, and 12,000,000 were advanced by the different bankers of Paris, who, I believe, were paid by bills of the receivers-general, the discount of which then amounted to about 33 per cent. The salaries of the first offices were not very considerable, and did not amount to anything like the exorbitant stipends of the Empire.

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.