LOUIS DE BOURRIENNE

MEMOIRS OF NAPOLEON BONAPARTE — VOLUME 06

Louis Antoine Fauvelet Bourrienne

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Louis Antoine Fauvelet de Bourrienne Memoirs of Napoleon Bonaparte — Volume 06

CHAPTER IX

1802.

Proverbial falsehood of bulletins—M. Doublet—Creation of the Legion of Honour—Opposition to it in the Council and other authorities of the State—The partisans of an hereditary system— The question of the Consulship for life.

The historian of these times ought to put no faith in the bulletins, despatches, notes, and proclamations which have emanated from Bonaparte, or passed through his hands. For my part, I believe that the proverb, "As great a liar as a bulletin," has as much truth in it as the axiom, two and two make four.

The bulletins always announced what Bonaparte wished to be believed true; but to form a proper judgment on any fact, counter-bulletins must be sought for and consulted. It is well known, too, that Bonaparte attached great importance to the place whence

he dated his bulletins; thus, he dated his decrees respecting the theatres and Hamburg beef at Moscow.

The official documents were almost always incorrect. There was falsity in the exaggerated descriptions of his victories, and falsity again in the suppression or palliation of his reverses and losses. A writer, if he took his materials from the bulletins and the official correspondence of the time, would compose a romance rather than a true history. Of this many proofs have been given in the present work.

Another thing which always appeared to me very remarkable was, that Bonaparte, notwithstanding his incontestable superiority, studied to depreciate the reputations of his military commanders, and to throw on their shoulders faults which he had committed himself. It is notorious that complaints and remonstrances, as energetic as they were well founded, were frequently addressed to General Bonaparte on the subject of his unjust and partial bulletins, which often attributed the success of a day to some one who had very little to do with it, and made no mention of the officer who actually had the command. The complaints made by the officers and soldiers stationed at Damietta compelled General Lanusse, the commander, to remonstrate against the alteration of a bulletin, by which an engagement with a body of Arabs was represented as an insignificant affair, and the loss trifling, though the General had stated the action to be one of importance, and the loss considerable. The misstatement, in consequence of his spirited

and energetic remonstrances, was corrected.

Bonaparte took Malta, as is well known, in forty-eight hours. The empire of the Mediterranean, secured to the English by the battle of Aboukir, and their numerous cruising vessels, gave them the means of starving the garrison, and of thus forcing General Vaubois, the commandant of Malta, who was cut off from all communication with France, to capitulate. Accordingly on the 4th of September 1800 he yielded up the Gibraltar of the Mediterranean, after a noble defence of two years. These facts require to be stated in order the better to understand what follows.

On 22d February 1802 a person of the name of Doublet, who was the commissary of the French Government at Malta when we possessed that island, called upon me at the Tuileries. He complained bitterly that the letter which he had written from Malta to the First Consul on the 2d Ventose, year VIII. (9th February 1800), had been altered in the 'Moniteur'. "I congratulated him," said M. Doublet, "on the 18th Brumaire, and informed him of the state of Malta, which was very alarming. Quite the contrary was printed in the 'Moniteur', and that is what I complain of. It placed me in a very disagreeable situation at Malta, where I was accused of having concealed the real situation of the island, in which I was discharging a public function that gave weight to my words." I observed to him that as I was not the editor of the 'Moniteur' it was of no use to apply to me; but I told him to give me a copy of the letter, and I would mention the

subject to the First Consul, and communicate the answer to him. Doublet searched his pocket for the letter, but could not find it. He said he would send a copy, and begged me to discover how the error originated. On the same day he sent me the copy of the letter, in which, after congratulating Bonaparte on his return, the following passage occurs:—"Hasten to save Malta with men and provisions: no time is to be lost." For this passage these words were substituted in the 'Moniteur': "His name inspires the brave defenders of Malta with fresh courage; we have men and provisions."

Ignorant of the motives of so strange a perversion, I showed this letter to the First Consul. He shrugged up his shoulders and said, laughing, "Take no notice of him, he is a fool; give yourself no further trouble about it."

It was clear there was nothing more to be done. It was, however, in despite of me that M. Doublet was played this ill turn. I represented to the First Consul the inconveniences which M. Doublet might experience from this affair. But I very rarely saw letters or reports published as they were received. I can easily understand how particular motives might be alleged in order to justify such falsifications; for, when the path of candour and good faith is departed from, any pretest is put forward to excuse bad conduct. What sort of a history would he write who should consult only the pages of the 'Moniteur'?

After the vote for adding a second ten years to the duration of Bonaparte's Consulship he created, on the 19th of May, the order

of the Legion of Honour. This institution was soon followed by that of the new nobility. Thus, in a short space of time, the Concordat to tranquillize consciences and re-establish harmony in the Church; the decree to recall the emigrants; the continuance of the Consular power for ten years, by way of preparation for the Consulship for life, and the possession of the Empire; and the creation, in a country which had abolished all distinctions, of an order which was to engender prodigies, followed closely on the heels of each other. The Bourbons, in reviving the abolished orders, were wise enough to preserve along with them the Legion of Honour.

It has already been seen how, in certain circumstances, the First Consul always escaped from the consequences of his own precipitation, and got rid of his blunders by throwing the blame on others—as, for example, in the affair of the parallel between Caesar, Cromwell, and Bonaparte. He was indeed so precipitate that one might say, had he been a gardener, he would have wished to see the fruits ripen before the blossoms had fallen off. This inconsiderate haste nearly proved fatal to the creation of the Legion of Honour, a project which ripened in his mind as soon as he beheld the orders glittering at the button-holes of the Foreign Ministers. He would frequently exclaim, "This is well! These are the things for the people!"

I was, I must confess, a decided partisan of the foundation in France of a new chivalric order, because I think, in every well-conducted State, the chief of the Government ought to do all in

his power to stimulate the honour of the citizens, and to render them more sensible to honorary distinctions than to pecuniary advantages. I tried, however, at the same time to warn the First Consul of his precipitancy. He heard me not; but I must with equal frankness confess that on this occasion I was soon freed from all apprehension with respect to the consequences of the difficulties he had to encounter in the Council and in the other constituted orders of the State.

On the 4th of May 1801 lie brought forward, for the first time officially, in the Council of State the question of the establishment of the Legion of Honour, which on the 19th May 1802 was proclaimed a law of the State. The opposition to this measure was very great, and all the power of the First Consul, the force of his arguments, and the immense influence of his position, could procure him no more than 14 votes out of 24. The same feeling was displayed at the Tribunate; where the measure only passed by a vote of 56 to 38. The balance was about the same in the Legislative Body, where the votes were 166 to 110. It follows, then, that out of the 394 voters in those three separate bodies a majority only of 78 was obtained. Surprised at so feeble a majority, the First Consul said in the evening, "Ah! I see very clearly the prejudices are still too strong. You were right; I should have waited. It was not a thing of such urgency. But then, it must be owned, the speakers for the measure defended it badly. The strong minority has not judged me fairly."— "Be calm," rejoined I: "without doubt it would have been better to wait; but the thing

is done, and you will soon find that the taste for these distinctions is not near gone by. It is a taste which belongs to the nature of man. You may expect some extraordinary circumstances from this creation—you will soon see them."

In April 1802 the First Consul left no stone unturned to get himself declared Consul for life. It is perhaps at this epoch of his career that he most brought into play those principles of duplicity and dissimulation which are commonly called Machiavellian. Never were trickery, falsehood, cunning, and affected moderation put into play with more talent or success.

In the month of March hereditary succession and a dynasty were in everybody's mouths. Lucien was the most violent propagator of these ideas, and he pursued his vocation of apostle with constancy and address. It has already been mentioned that, by his brother's confession; he published in 1800 a pamphlet enforcing the same ideas; which work Bonaparte afterwards condemned as a premature development of his projects. M. de Talleyrand, whose ideas could not be otherwise than favourable to the monarchical form of government, was ready to enter into explanations with the Cabinets of Europe on the subject. The words which now constantly resounded in every ear were "stability and order," under cloak of which the downfall of the people's right was to be concealed. At the same time Bonaparte, with the view of disparaging the real friends of constitutional liberty, always called them ideologues,

—[I have classed all these people under the

denomination of Ideologues, which, besides, is what specially and literally fits them,—searchers after ideas (ideas generally empty). They have been made more ridiculous than even I expected by this application, a correct one, of the term ideologue to them. The phrase has been successful, I believe, because it was mine (Napoleon in Iung's Lucien, tome ii. p, 293). Napoleon welcomed every attack on this description of sage. Much pleased with a discourse by Royer Collard, he said to Talleyrand, "Do you know, Monsieur is Grand Electeur, that a new and serious philosophy is rising in my university, which may do us great honour and disembarrass us completely of the ideologues, slaying them on the spot by reasoning?" It is with something of the same satisfaction that Renan, writing of 1898, says that the finer dreams had been disastrous when brought into the domain of facts, and that human concerns only began to improve when the ideologues ceased to meddle with them (Souvenirs, p. 122).]—

or terrorists. Madame Bonaparte opposed with fortitude the influence of counsels which she believed fatal to her husband. He indeed spoke rarely, and seldom confidentially, with her on politics or public affairs. "Mind your distaff or your needle," was with him a common phrase. The individuals who applied themselves with most perseverance in support of the hereditary question were Lucien, Roederer, Regnault de St. Jean d'Angely, and Fontanel. Their efforts were aided by the conclusion of peace with England, which, by re-establishing general tranquillity for a time, afforded the First Consul an opportunity of forwarding

any plan.

While the First Consul aspired to the throne of France, his brothers, especially Lucien, affected a ridiculous pride and pretension. Take an almost incredible example of which I was witness. On Sunday, the 9th of May, Lucien came to see Madame Bonaparte, who said to him, "Why did you not come to dinner last Monday?"—"Because there was no place marked for me: the brothers of Napoleon ought to have the first place after him."— "What am I to understand by that?" answered Madame Bonaparte. "If you are the brother of Bonaparte, recollect what you were. At my house all places are the same. Eugene world never have committed such a folly."

—[On such points there was constant trouble with the Bonapartist family, as will be seen in Madame de Remusat's Memoirs. For an instance, in 1812, where Joseph insisted on his mother taking precedence of Josephine at a dinner in his house, when Napoleon settled the matter by seizing Josephine's arm and leading her in first, to the consternation of the party. But Napoleon, right in this case, had his own ideas on such points, The place of the Princess Elisa, the eldest of his sisters, had been put below that of Caroline, Queen of Naples. Elisa was then only princess of Lucca. The Emperor suddenly rose, and by a shift to the right placed the Princess Elisa above the Queen. 'Now,' said he, 'do not forget that in the imperial family I am the only King.' (Iung's Lucien, tome ii. p. 251), This rule he seems to have adhered to, for when he and his brothers went in

the same carriage to the Champ de Mai in 1815, Jerome, titular King of Westphalia, had to take the front seat, while his elder brother, Lucien, only bearing the Roman title of Prince de Canino, sat on one of the seats of honour alongside Napoleon. Jerome was disgusted, and grumbled at a King having to give way to a mere Roman Prince, See Iung's Lucien, tome ii. p, 190.]—

At this period, when the Consulate for life was only in embryo, flattering counsels poured in from all quarters, and tended to encourage the First Consul in his design of grasping at absolute power.

Liberty rejected an unlimited power, and set bounds to the means he wished and had to employ in order to gratify his excessive love of war and conquest. "The present state of things, this Consulate of ten years," said he to me, does not satisfy me; "I consider it calculated to excite unceasing troubles." On the 7th of July 1801, he observed, "The question whether France will be a Republic is still doubtful: it will be decided in five or six years." It was clear that he thought this too long a term. Whether he regarded France as his property, or considered himself as the people's delegate and the defender of their rights, I am convinced the First Consul wished the welfare of France; but then that welfare was in his mind inseparable from absolute power. It was with pain I saw him following this course. The friends of liberty, those who sincerely wished to maintain a Government constitutionally free, allowed themselves to be prevailed upon

to consent to an extension of ten years of power beyond the ten years originally granted by the constitution. They made this sacrifice to glory and to that power which was its consequence; and they were far from thinking they were lending their support to shameless intrigues. They were firm, but for the moment only, and the nomination for life was rejected by the Senate, who voted only ten years more power to Bonaparte, who saw the vision of his ambition again adjourned.

The First Consul dissembled his displeasure with that profound art which, when he could not do otherwise, he exercised to an extreme degree. To a message of the Senate on the subject of that nomination he returned a calm but evasive and equivocating answer, in which, nourishing his favourite hope of obtaining more from the people than from the Senate, he declared with hypocritical humility, "That he would submit to this new sacrifice if the wish of the people demanded what the Senate authorised." Such was the homage he paid to the sovereignty of the people, which was soon to be trampled under his feet!

An extraordinary convocation of the Council of State took place on Monday, the 10th of May. A communication was made to them, not merely of the Senate's consultation, but also of the First Consul's adroit and insidious reply. The Council regarded the first merely as a notification, and proceeded to consider on what question the people should be consulted. Not satisfied with granting to the First Consul ten years of prerogative, the Council

thought it best to strike the iron while it was hot, and not to stop short in the middle of so pleasing a work. In fine, they decided that the following question should be put to the people: "Shall the First Consul be appointed for life, and shall he have the power of nominating his successor?" The reports of the police had besides much influence on the result of this discussion, for they one and all declared that the whole of Paris demanded a Consul for life, with the right of naming a successor. The decisions on these two questions were carried as it were by storm. The appointment for life passed unanimously, and the right of naming the successor by a majority. The First Consul, however, formally declared that he condemned this second measure, which had not originated with himself. On receiving the decision of the Council of State the First Consul, to mask his plan for attaining absolute power, thought it advisable to appear to reject a part of what was offered him. He therefore cancelled that clause which proposed to give him the power of appointing a successor, and which had been carried by a small majority.

CHAPTER X

1802.

General Bernadotte pacifies La vendee and suppresses a mutiny at Tours—Bonaparte's injustice towards him—A premeditated scene— Advice given to Bernadotte, and Bonaparte disappointed—The First Consul's residence at St. Cloud—His rehearsals for the Empire— His contempt of mankind—Mr. Fox and Bonaparte—Information of plans of assassination—A military dinner given by Bonaparte—Moreau not of the party—Effect of the 'Senates-consultes' on the Consulate for life—Journey to Plombieres—Previous scene between Lucien and Josephine—Theatrical representations at Neuilly and Malmaison—Loss of a watch, and honesty rewarded—Canova at St. Cloud— Bonaparte's reluctance to stand for a model.

Having arrived at nearly the middle of the career which I have undertaken to trace, before I advance farther I must go back for a few moments, as I have already frequently done, in order to introduce some circumstances which escaped my recollection, or which I purposely reserved, that I might place them amongst facts analogous to them: Thus, for instance, I have only referred in passing to a man who, since become a monarch, has not ceased to honour me with his friendship, as will be seen in the course of my Memoirs, since the part we have seen him play in the

events of the 18th Brumaire. This man, whom the inexplicable combination of events has raised to a throne for the happiness of the people he is called to govern, is Bernadotte.

It was evident that Bernadotte must necessarily fall into a kind of disgrace for not having supported Bonaparte's projects at the period of the overthrow of the Directory. The First Consul, however, did not dare to avenge himself openly; but he watched for every opportunity to remove Bernadotte from his presence, to place him in difficult situations, and to entrust him with missions for which no precise instructions were given, in the hope that Bernadotte would commit faults for which the First Consul might make him wholly responsible.

At the commencement of the Consulate the deplorable war in La Vendee raged in all its intensity. The organization of the Chouans was complete, and this civil war caused Bonaparte much more uneasiness than that which he was obliged to conduct on the Rhine and in Italy, because, from the success of the Vendeans might arise a question respecting internal government, the solution of which was likely to be contrary to Bonaparte's views. The slightest success of the Vendeans spread alarm amongst the holders of national property; and, besides, there was no hope of reconciliation between France and England, her eternal and implacable enemy, as long as the flame of insurrection remained unextinguished.

The task of terminating this unhappy struggle was obviously a difficult one. Bonaparte therefore resolved to impose it

on Bernadotte; but this general's conciliatory disposition, his chivalrous manners, his tendency to indulgence, and a happy mixture of prudence and firmness, made him succeed where others would have failed. He finally established good order and submission to the laws.

Some time after the pacification of La Vendee a rebellious disposition manifested itself at Tours amongst the soldiers of a regiment stationed there. The men refused to march until they received their arrears of pay. Bernadotte, as commander-in-chief of the army of the west, without being alarmed at the disturbance, ordered the fifty-second demi-brigade— the one in question—to be drawn up in the square of Tours, where, at the very head of the corps, the leaders of the mutiny were by his orders arrested without any resistance being offered. Carnot who was then Minister of War, made a report to the First Consul on this affair, which, but for the firmness of Bernadotte, might have been attended with disagreeable results. Carnet's report contained a plain statement of the facts, and of General Bernadotte's conduct. Bonaparte was, however, desirous to find in it some pretext for blaming him, and made me write these words on the margin of the report: "General Bernadotte did not act discreetly in adopting such severe measures against the fifty-second demi-brigade, he not having the means, if he head been unsuccessful, of re-establishing order in a town the garrison of which was not strong enough to subdue the mutineers."

A few days after, the First Consul having learned that the

result of this affair was quite different from that which he affected to dread, and being convinced that by Bernadotte's firmness alone order had been restored, he found himself in some measure constrained to write to the General, and he dictated the following letter to me:

PARIS, 11th Vendemiaire. Year XI.

> CITIZEN-GENERAL—I have read with interest the account of what you did to re-establish order in the fifty-second demi-brigade, and also the report of General Liebert, dated the 5th Vendemiaire. Tell that officer that the Government is satisfied with his conduct. His promotion from the rank of Colonel to that of General of brigade is confirmed. I wish that brave officer to come to Paris. He has afforded an example of firmness and energy which does honour to a soldier.
>
> *(Signed) BONAPARTE.*

Thus in the same affair Bonaparte, in a few days, from the spontaneous expression of blame dictated by hate, was reduced to the necessity of declaring his approbation, which he did, as may be seen, with studied coldness, and even taking pains to make his praises apply to Colonel Liebert, and not to the general-in-chief.

Time only served to augment Bonaparte's dislike of Bernadotte. It might be said that the farther he advanced in his rapid march towards absolute power the more animosity he cherished against the individual who had refused to aid his first

steps in his adventurous career. At the same time the persons about Bonaparte who practised the art of flattering failed not to multiply reports and insinuations against Bernadotte. I recollect one day, when there was to be a grand public levee, seeing Bonaparte so much out of temper that I asked him the cause of it. "I can bear it no longer," he replied impetuously. "I have resolved to have a scene with Bernadotte to-day. He will probably be here. I will open the fire, let what will come of it. He may do what he pleases. We shall see! It is time there should be an end of this."

I had never before observed the First Consul so violently irritated. He was in a terrible passion, and I dreaded the moment when the levee was to open. When he left me to go down to the salon I availed myself of the opportunity to get there before him, which I could easily do, as the salon was not twenty steps from the cabinet. By good luck Bernadotte was the first person I saw. He was standing in the recess of a window which looked on the square of the Carrousel. To cross the salon and reach the General was the work of a moment. "General!" said I, "trust me and retire!—I have good reasons for advising it!" Bernadotte, seeing my extreme anxiety, and aware of the sincere sentiments of esteem end friendship which I entertained for him, consented to retire, and I regarded this as a triumph; for, knowing Bernadotte's frankness of character and his nice sense of honour, I was quite certain that he would not submit to the harsh observations which Bonaparte intended to address to him. My stratagem had all the success I could desire. The First Consul

suspected nothing, and remarked only one thing, which was that his victim was absent. When the levee was over he said to me, "What do you think of it, Bourrienne?—-Bernadotte did not come."—"So much the better for him, General," was my reply. Nothing further happened. The First Consul on returning from Josephine found me in the cabinet, and consequently could suspect nothing, and my communication with Bernadotte did not occupy five minutes. Bernadotte always expressed himself much gratified with the proof of friendship I gave him at this delicate conjuncture. The fact is, that from a disposition of my mind, which I could not myself account for, the more Bonaparte'a unjust hatred of Bernadotte increased the more sympathy and admiration I felt for the noble character of the latter.

The event in question occurred in the spring of 1802. It was at this period that Bonaparte first occupied St. Cloud, which he was much pleased with, because he found himself more at liberty there than at the Tuileries; which palace is really only a prison for royalty, as there a sovereign cannot even take the air at a window without immediately being the object of the curiosity of the public, who collect in large crowds. At St. Cloud, on the contrary, Bonaparte could walk out from his cabinet and prolong his promenade without being annoyed by petitioners. One of his first steps was to repair the cross road leading from St. Cloud to Malmaison, between which places Bonaparte rode in a quarter of an hour. This proximity to the country, which he liked, made staying at St. Cloud yet pleasanter to him. It was at

St. Cloud that the First Consul made, if I may so express it, his first rehearsals of the grand drama of the Empire. It was there he began to introduce, in external forms, the habits and etiquette which brought to mind the ceremonies of sovereignty. He soon perceived the influence which pomp of ceremony, brilliancy of appearance, and richness of costume, exercise over the mass of mankind. "Men," he remarked to me a this period, "well deserve the contempt I feel for them. I have only to put some gold lace on the coats of my virtuous republicans and they immediately become just what I wish them."

I remember one day, after one of his frequent sallies of contempt for human kind, I observed to him that although baubles might excite vulgar admiration, there were some distinguished men who did not permit themselves to be fascinated by their allurements; and I mentioned the celebrated Fox by way of example, who, previous to the conclusion of the peace of Amiens, visited Paris, where he was remarked for his extreme simplicity. The First Consul said, "Ah! you are right with respect to him. Mr. Fox is a truly great man, and pleases me much."

In fact, Bonaparte always received Mr. Fox's visits with the greatest satisfaction; and after every conversation they had together he never failed to express to me the pleasure which he experienced in discoursing with a man every way worthy of the great celebrity he had attained. He considered him a very superior man, and wished he might have to treat with him in

his future negotiations with England. It may be supposed that Mr. Fox, on his part, never forgot the terms of intimacy, I may say of confidence, on which he had been with the First Consul. In fact, he on several occasions informed him in time of war of the plots formed against his life. Less could not be expected from a man of so noble a character. I can likewise affirm, having more than once been in possession of proofs of the fact, that the English Government constantly rejected with indignation all such projects. I do not mean those which had for their object the overthrow of the Consular or Imperial Government, but all plans of assassination and secret attacks on the person of Bonaparte, whether First Consul or Emperor. I will here request the indulgence of the reader whilst I relate a circumstance which occurred a year before Mr. Fox's journey to Paris; but as it refers to Moreau, I believe that the transposition will be pardoned more easily than the omission.

During the summer 1801 the First Consul took a fancy to give a grand military dinner at a restaurateur's. The restaurateur he favoured with his company was Veri, whose establishment was situated on the terrace of the Feuillans with an entrance into the garden of the Tuileries. Bonaparte did not send an invitation to Moreau, whom I met by chance that day in the following manner:—The ceremony of the dinner at Veri's leaving me at liberty to dispose of my time, I availed myself of it to go and dine at a restaurateur's named Rose, who then enjoyed great celebrity amongst the distinguished gastronomes. I dined in company with

M. Carbonnet, a friend of Moreau's family, and two or three other persons. Whilst we were at table in the rotunda we were informed by the waiter who attended on us that General Moreau and his wife, with Lacuee and two other military men, were in an adjoining apartment. Suchet, who had dined at Veri's, where he said everything was prodigiously dull, on rising from the table joined Moreau's party. These details we learned from M. Carbonnet, who left us for a few moments to see the General and Madame Moreau.

Bonaparte's affectation in not inviting Moreau at the moment when the latter had returned a conqueror from the army of the Rhine, and at the same time the affectation of Moreau in going publicly the same day to dine at another restaurateur's, afforded ground for the supposition that the coolness which existed between them would soon be converted into enmity. The people of Paris naturally thought that the conqueror of Marengo might, without any degradation, have given the conqueror of Hohenlinden a seat at his table.

By the commencement of the year 1802 the Republic had ceased to be anything else than a fiction, or an historical recollection. All that remained of it was a deceptive inscription on the gates of the Palace. Even at the time of his installation at the Tuileries, Bonaparte had caused the two trees of liberty which were planted in the court to be cut down; thus removing the outward emblems before he destroyed the reality. But the moment the Senatorial decisions of the 2d and 4th of August

were published it was evident to the dullest perceptions that the power of the First Consul wanted nothing but a name.

After these 'Consultes' Bonaparte readily accustomed himself to regard the principal authorities of the State merely as necessary instruments for the exercise of his power. Interested advisers then crowded round him. It was seriously proposed that he should restore the ancient titles, as being more in harmony with the new power which the people had confided to him than the republican forms. He was still of opinion, however, according to his phrase, that "the pear was not yet ripe," and would not hear this project spoken of for a moment. "All this," he said to me one day, "will come in good time; but you must see, Bourrienne, that it is necessary I should, in the first place, assume a title, from which the others that I will give to everybody will naturally take their origin. The greatest difficulty is surmounted. There is no longer any person to deceive. Everybody sees as clear as day that it is only one step which separates the throne from the Consulate for life. However, we must be cautious. There are some troublesome fellows in the Tribunate, but I will take care of them."

Whilst these serious questions agitated men's minds the greater part of the residents at Malmaison took a trip to Plombieres. Josephine, Bonaparte's mother, Madame Beauharnais-Lavallette, Hortense, and General Rapp, were of this party. It pleased the fancy of the jocund company to address to me a bulletin of the pleasant and unpleasant occurrences

of the journey. I insert this letter merely as a proof of the intimacy which existed between the writers and myself. It follows, precisely as I have preserved it, with the exception of the blots, for which it will be seen they apologised.

AN ACCOUNT OF THE JOURNEY TO PLOMBIERES.

To the Inhabitants of Malmaison.

The whole party left Malmaison in tears, which brought on such dreadful headaches that all the amiable persons were quite overcome by the idea of the journey. Madame Bonaparte, mere, supported the fatigues of this memorable day with the greatest courage; but Madame Bonaparte, Consulesse, did not show any. The two young ladies who sat in the dormouse, Mademoiselle Hortense and Madame Lavallette, were rival candidates for a bottle of Eau de Cologne; and every now and then the amiable M. Rapp made the carriage stop for the comfort of his poor little sick heart, which overflowed with bile: in fine, he was obliged to take to bed on arriving at Epernay, while the rest of the amiable party tried to drown their sorrows in champagne. The second day was more fortunate on the score of health and spirits, but provisions were wanting, and great were the sufferings of the stomach. The travellers lived on the hope of a good supper at Toul; but despair was at its height when, on arriving there, they found only a wretched inn, and nothing in it. We saw some odd-looking folks there, which indemnified us a little for spinach dressed in lamp-oil, and red asparagus fried with curdled milk. Who would not

have been amused to see the Malmaison gourmands seated at a table so shockingly served!

In no record of history is there to be found a day passed in distress so dreadful as that on which we arrived at Plombieres. On departing from Toul we intended to breakfast at Nancy, for every stomach had been empty for two days; but the civil and military authorities came out to meet us, and prevented us from executing our plan. We continued our route, wasting away, so that you might, see us growing thinner every moment. To complete our misfortune, the dormouse, which seemed to have taken a fancy to embark on the Moselle for Metz, barely escaped an overturn. But at Plombieres we have been well compensated for this unlucky journey, for on our arrival we were received with all kinds of rejoicings. The town was illuminated, the cannon fired, and the faces of handsome women at all the windows give us reason to hope that we shall bear our absence from Malmaison with the less regret.

With the exception of some anecdotes, which we reserve for chit-chat on our return, you have here a correct account of our journey, which we, the undersigned, hereby certify.

JOSEPHINE BONAPARTE.
BEAUHARNAIS-LAPALLETTE.
HORTENSE BEAUHARNAIS.
RAPP.
BONAPARTE, mere.

The company ask pardon for the blots.
21st Messidor.

It is requested that the person who receives this journal will show it to all who take an interest in the fair travellers.

This journey to Plombieres was preceded by a scene which I should abstain from describing if I had not undertaken to relate the truth respecting the family of the First Consul. Two or three days before her departure Madame Bonaparte sent for me. I obeyed the summons, and found her in tears. "What a man-what a man is that Lucien!" she exclaimed in accents of grief. "If you knew, my friend, the shameful proposals he has dared to make to me! 'You are going to the waters,' said he; 'you must get a child by some other person since you cannot have one by him.' Imagine the indignation with which I received such advice. 'Well,' he continued, 'if you do not wish it, or cannot help it, Bonaparte must get a child by another woman, and you must adopt it, for it is necessary to secure an hereditary successor. It is for your interest; you must know that.'— 'What, sir!' I replied, 'do you imagine the nation will suffer a bastard to govern it? Lucien! Lucien! you would ruin your brother! This is dreadful! Wretched should I be, were any one to suppose me capable of listening, without horror, to your infamous proposal! Your ideas are poisonous; your language horrible!'—'Well, Madame,' retorted he, 'all I can say to that is, that I am really sorry for you!'"

The amiable Josephine was sobbing whilst she described this scene to me, and I was not insensible to the indignation which

she felt. The truth is, that at that period Lucien, though constantly affecting to despise power for himself, was incessantly labouring to concentrate it in the hands of his brother; and he considered three things necessary to the success of his views, namely, hereditary succession, divorce, and the Imperial Government.

Lucien had a delightful house near Neuilly. Some days before the deplorable scene which I have related he invited Bonaparte and all the inmates at Malmaison to witness a theatrical representation. 'Alzire' was the piece performed. Elise played Alzire, and Lucien, Zamore. The warmth of their declarations, the energetic expression of their gestures, the too faithful nudity of costume, disgusted most of the spectators, and Bonaparte more than any other. When the play was over he was quite indignant. "It is a scandal," he said to me in an angry tone; "I ought not to suffer such indecencies—I will give Lucien to understand that I will have no more of it." When his brother had resumed his own dress, and came into the salon, he addressed him publicly, and gave him to understand that he must for the future desist from such representations. When we returned to Malmaison; he again spoke of what had passed with dissatisfaction. "What!" said he, "when I am endeavouring to restore purity of manners, my brother and sister must needs exhibit themselves upon the boards almost in a state of nudity! It is an insult!"

Lucien had a strong predilection for theatrical exhibitions, to which he attached great importance. The fact is, he declaimed

in a superior style, and might have competed with the best professional actors. It was said that the turban of Orosmane, the costume of America, the Roman toga, or the robe of the high priest of Jerusalem, all became him equally well; and I believe that this was the exact truth. Theatrical representations were not confined to Neuilly. We had our theatre and our company of actors at Malmaison; but there everything was conducted with the greatest decorum; and now that I have got behind the scenes, I will not quit them until I have let the reader into the secrets of our drama.

By the direction of the First Consul a very pretty little theatre was built at Malmaison. Our usual actors were Eugene BEAUHARNAIS, Hortense, Madame Murat, Lauriston, M. Didelot, one of the prefects of the Palace, some other individuals belonging to the First Consul's household, and myself. Freed from the cares of government, which we confined as much as possible to the Tuileries, we were a very happy colony at Malmaison; and, besides, we were young, and what is there to which youth does not add charms? The pieces which the First Consul most liked to see us perform were, 'Le Barbier de Seville' and 'Defiance et Malice'. In Le Barbier Lauriston played the part of Count Almaviva; Hortense, Rosins; Eugene, Basil; Didelot, Figaro; I, Bartholo; and Isabey, l'Aveille. Our other stock pieces were, Projets de Mariage, La Gageltre, the Dapit Anloureux, in which I played the part of the valet; and L'Impromptu de Campagne, in which I enacted the Baron, having for my Baroness

the young and handsome Caroline Murat.

Hortense's acting was perfection, Caroline was middling, Eugene played very well, Lauriston was rather heavy, Didelot passable, and I may venture to assert, without vanity, that I was not quite the worst of the company. If we were not good actors it was not for want of good instruction and good advice. Talma and Michot came to direct us, and made us rehearse before them, sometimes altogether and sometimes separately. How many lessons have I received from Michot whilst walking in the beautiful park of Malmaison! And may I be excused for saying, that I now experience pleasure in looking back upon these trifles, which are matters of importance when one is young, and which contrasted so singularly with the great theatre on which we did not represent fictitious characters? We had, to adopt theatrical language, a good supply of property. Bonaparte presented each of us with a collection of dramas very well bound; and, as the patron of the company, he provided us with rich and elegant dresses.

—[While Bourrienne, belonging to the Malmaison company, considered that the acting at Neuilly was indecent, Lucien, who refused to act at Malmaison, naturally thought the Malmaison troupe was dull. "Hortense and Caroline filled the principal parts. They were very commonplace. In this they followed the unfortunate Marie Antoinette and her companions. Louis XVI., not naturally polite, when seeing them act, had said that it was royally badly acted" (see Madame Campan's Life of Marie

Antoinette, tome i. p. 299). "The First Consul said of his troupe that it was sovereignly badly acted". . . Murat, Lannes, and even Caroline ranted. Elisa, who, having been educated at Saint Cyr, spoke purely and without accent, refused to act. Janot acted well the drunken parts, and even the others he undertook. The rest were decidedly bad. Worse than bad— ridiculous" (Iung's Lucien's, tome ii. p. 256). Rival actors are not fair critics. Let us hear Madame Junot (tome ii. p. 103). "The cleverest of our company was M. de Bourrienne. He played the more dignified characters in real perfection, and his talent was the more pleasing as it was not the result of study, but of a perfect comprehension of his part." And she goes on to say that even the best professional actors might have learnt from him in some parts. The audience was not a pleasant one to face. It was the First Consul's habit to invite forty persons to dinner, and a hundred and fifty for the evening, and consequently to hear, criticise, and banter us without mercy" (Memoirs of Duchesse d'Abrantes, tome ii. p. 108).]—

Bonaparte took great pleasure in our performances. He liked to see plays acted by persons with whom he was familiar. Sometimes he complimented us on our exertions. Although I was as much amused with the thing as others, I was more than once obliged to remind him that my occupations left me but little time to learn my parts. Then he would assume his coaxing manner and say, "Come, do not vex me! You have such a memory! You know that it amuses me. You see that these performances render Malmaison gay and animated; Josephine takes much pleasure in

them. Rise earlier in the morning.—In fact, I sleep too much; is not that the cafe—Come, Bourrienne, do oblige me. You make me laugh so heartily! Do not deprive me of this pleasure. I have not over much amusement, as you well know."—"All, truly! I would not deprive you of any pleasure. I am delighted to be able to contribute to your amusement." After a conversation of this sort I could not do less than set about studying my part.

At this period, during summer, I had half the Sunday to myself. I was, however, obliged to devote a portion of this precious leisure to pleasing Bonaparte by studying a new part as a surprise for him. Occasionally, however, I passed the time at Ruel. I recollect that one day, when I had hurried there from Malmaison, I lost a beautiful watch made by Breguet. It was four o'clock in the afternoon, and the road was that day thronged with people. I made my loss publicly known by means of the crier of Ruel. An hour after, as I was sitting down to table, a young lad belonging to the village brought me my watch. He had found it on the high road in a wheel rut. I was pleased with the probity of this young man, and rewarded both him and his father, who accompanied him. I reiterated the circumstance the same evening to the First Consul, who was so struck with this instance of honesty that he directed me to procure information respecting the young man and his family. I learned that they were honest peasants. Bonaparte gave employment to three brothers of this family; and, what was most difficult to persuade him to, he exempted the young man who brought me the watch from the

conscription.

When a fact of this nature reached Bonaparte's ear it was seldom that he did not give the principal actor in it some proof of his satisfaction. Two qualities predominated in his character —kindness and impatience. Impatience, when he was under its influence, got the better of him; it was then impossible for him to control himself. I had a remarkable proof of it about this very period.

Canova having arrived in Paris came to St. Cloud to model the figure of the First Consul, of whom he was about to make a colossal statue. This great artist came often, in the hope of getting his model to stand in the proper attitude; but Bonaparte was so tired, disgusted, and fretted by the process, that he very seldom put himself in the required attitude, and then only for a short time. Bonaparte notwithstanding had the highest regard for Canova. Whenever he was announced the First Consul sent me to keep him company until he was at leisure to give him a sitting; but he would shrug up his shoulders and say, "More modeling! Good Heavens, how vexatious!" Canova expressed great displeasure at not being able to study his model as he wished to do, and the little anxiety of Bonaparte on the subject damped the ardour of his imagination. Everybody agrees in saying that he has not succeeded in the work, and I have explained the reason. The Duke of Wellington afterwards possessed this colossal statue, which was about twice his own height.

CHAPTER XI

1802.

Bonaparte's principle as to the change of Ministers—Fouche—His influence with the First Consul—Fouche's dismissal—The departments of Police and Justice united under Regnier—Madame Bonaparte's regret for the dismissal of Fouche—Family scenes—Madame Louis Bonaparte's pregnancy—False and infamous reports to Josephine— Legitimacy and a bastard—Raederer reproached by Josephine—Her visit to Ruel—Long conversation with her—Assertion at St. Helena respecting a great political fraud.

It is a principle particularly applicable to absolute governments that a prince should change his ministers as seldom as possible, and never except upon serious grounds. Bonaparte acted on this principle when First Consul, and also when he became Emperor. He often allowed unjust causes to influence him, but he never dismissed a Minister without cause; indeed, he more than once, without any reason, retained Ministers longer than he ought to have done in the situations in which he had placed them. Bonaparte's tenacity in this respect, in some instances, produced very opposite results. For instance, it afforded M. Gaudin' time to establish a degree of order in the administration of Finance which before his time had never

existed; and on the other hand, it enabled M. Decres to reduce the Ministry of Marine to an unparalleled state of confusion.

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.