
Napoleon and His Times

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N A P O L E O N

AND

HIS TIMES.

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ON a fine warm morning in September, 1826, I was seated in one of the shadiest recesses of those lovely woodlands which skirt Plombières, on the side near the Stanislas Fountain. I had a book in my hand, but I was not reading: my thoughts were dreamingly wandering back to a glorious period of the past. Numerous pedestrians paced along the little path which intersected the wood, and near which I was sitting; but they did not rouse me from my reverie: they flitted like shadows before my eyes, without in any way fixing my attention.

I sat with my head resting on my hand, and with my eyes cast down, in a state of complete

abstraction. My capricious fancy unfolded before me the magnificent basin of Antwerp, the port, and the spacious dock-yards. Two fine vessels, gaily decked out, were to be launched that day, the one in the morning, and the other in the evening.

Napoleon was about to present to the people of the Netherlands, the grand-niece of their celebrated Christina; and a series of truly regal fêtes were to take place in the principal towns of conquered, though not subjugated, Belgium.

The cathedral clock struck four as we alighted from our carriage at the Tête de Flandre. We got into a small boat, which landed us at the port of Antwerp, where all was movement and bustle, though the sun had scarcely risen. The sky appeared dull and cloudy. A *Commissaire de Marine*, in full uniform, who was issuing orders with a busy and important air, looked up, and, observing that the clouds were becoming more and more gloomy, his countenance expressed great anxiety. Addressing himself to an old soldier, who was occupied in tying some cords, he said, "Maringo, the wind is southwest; I am afraid we shall have some rain. That will be confoundedly vexing."

"Pooh!" replied the soldier, with an indescribable air of confidence, "*he* always carries the Sun of Austerlitz in his pocket. What does *he* care for a few clouds!"

"Monsieur," said I, addressing the *Commissaire*, "at what hour is the first ship to be launched?"

"Their Majesties will be here at six o'clock. Time and tide wait for no one."

"If they should wait for *him*," said the soldier, in a sort of muttering tone, "it would be nothing more than their duty."

We could not repress our laughter at this strange remark.

"There, my good man," said I, presenting to him a five-franc piece; "take this, and drink the Emperor's health."

"Thank you, Madame," said he; "I would drink the Emperor's health with all my heart. But the truth is," added he, significantly scratching his ear, "that Maringo——Maringo knows his own failing. If I begin to drink the Emperor's health I shall not have done whilst a single sou of the five-franc piece remains; and that will not do——especially after *he* did me the honor to notice me yesterday; 'What do you do here, my brave fellow?'" said *he*. Now, if I were to drink my hundred sous, I should certainly be turned to the right about, and marched to the Salle de Police. I would not for worlds that our beloved Emperor should have the least cause to reproach me."

Napoleon possessed a power of fascination which inspired his brave and devoted soldiers with the singular belief that each of them individually was an object of attention and consideration to their sovereign.

The places assigned to me and my friends were exactly facing the imperial tent. We saw the Emperor arrive. His youthful consort, Maria Louisa, was the object of his assiduous attention. Napoleon's countenance beamed with love and happiness; and he seemed to be proud of showing the Empress to his subjects. The ceremony of the launch commenced. A thundering discharge of artillery from the fort, together with the guns on board the ships in the river, saluted the new vessel as she majestically glided into the Scheldt. At that moment, the Emperor, whose countenance appeared to bright-

en up with increased animation at the firing of the guns, passed his arm round the waist of his trembling wife, and drew her close to him, as if to protect her from a danger which had no existence. Three years later, that wife forsook her husband, and accepted the protection of others. But, thought I, Maria Louisa is not a Frenchwoman: this reflection soothed my indignant feelings.

I now awoke from my reverie of recollections. I mechanically raised my head, and I observed a gentleman slowly ascending the sloping path near the spot where I was seated, and from time to time stopping to rest himself. As he approached I was struck with his appearance. His figure was slender and pliant, and he had an air of youth, in spite of his premature wrinkles and his pale and attenuated countenance.

A thought, as it were a reflection of the past, suddenly darted across my mind. That person, said I within myself, is like the apparition of one who is still fresh in my recollection. But when last I saw him, he held his head proudly erect; his figure, which now appears bowed by infirmity, was then upright, and a rich military uniform accorded with his graceful and gallant bearing. His whole aspect denoted energy and courage; his look bespoke the confidence of a man occupying one of those high positions, to fall from which must be almost at the expense of life.

I beheld before me the Grand Equerry of the Empire, the Duke de Vicenza.

As I gazed upon him, a feeling of melancholy took possession of my mind, and tears, which I could not repress, overflowed my eyes.

“Mademoiselle,” said the Duke, addressing

my femme de chambre, who was sitting at work near me, "does this path lead straight to the Stanislas Fountain?"

"Yes, Monsieur le Duc," replied I, rising hastily from my seat; though I was at the time very ill and feeble.

He advanced a few steps towards me, and with that grace of manner for which all will admit he was eminently distinguished, he said—

"Madame, have I the honor to be known to you?"

"Yes," I replied; "all the golden dreams of my youth refer to the glories of the Empire. Of late years I have unremittingly deplored its disasters; and the devoted loyalty of the Duke de Vicenza is in my mind inseparably connected with the name of Napoleon!"

We entered cordially into conversation. We revived old recollections. The great actors in the heroic drama had been mutually known to us. Our sympathies reverted warmly and vividly to the past. From that day our gossipings were interminable.

When I met the Duke de Vicenza at Plombières, in 1826, he had grown exceedingly thin. His hair was almost entirely gray, and his altered features bore evidence of the poignant mental suffering he had endured. Instead of a few years, it seemed as though half a century had passed over Napoleon's brilliant equerry. That dreadful and incurable disease, a cancer in the stomach, was rapidly shortening the thread of his existence. Doctor Broussais had advised him to take the waters of Plombières; but the duke made little or no trial of their efficacy. Life was a burden to him. That existence once so radiant with glory and happiness, was now overclouded

by painful recollections. "There is no longer any room for me in France," I have often heard him say.

The two months I passed at Plombières were to me a sort of compensation for one of those intervals of trial in which we sometimes imagine ourselves forsaken by Heaven—in which we ask ourselves what crime we are doomed to expiate by unremitting suffering—when we pray that each succeeding night may be our last, whilst every morning brings a renewal of pain and anguish. In this pitiable condition, death, which we can neither fly from nor overtake, is ever present in our view.

I had lingered through three long years in a state of languor between life and death. My resignation and fortitude were almost exhausted. My medical attendants ordered me to travel; and I, weary of confinement, and of those monotonous amusements which had for a time afforded some little diversion during lingering nights and days, joyfully availed myself of the permission afforded me, to suffer in other places, to see other objects, and to inhale a change of air. One of my relations, Colonel R——, offered to be my escort. We travelled by short stages, and the journey was so long, that Plombières seemed to me to be at the ~~the~~ further extremity of the world. On our arrival we found the town full of company; and I was obliged to take up my abode at the Tête d'Or, the hotel at which our postillion stopped.

My feeble condition prevented me from either making or receiving visits; and I lived perfectly tranquil and secluded in the gay and fashionable town. There were at that time six thousand visitors in Plombières. Arrivals and departures