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**Memoirs of Barras, Member of the  
Directorate**

**Duruy George**

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**Title: Memoirs of Barras, Member of the Directorate**

**Author: Duruy George**

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## GENERAL INTRODUCTION

### I.—THE HISTORY OF THE MEMOIRS. DISPOSITIONS TAKEN BY BARRAS IN HIS WILL IN REGARD TO HIS MEMOIRS

IN a holographic will, dated Paris, the 30th day of April, 1827, registered on the 2d day of February, 1829, and deposited, pursuant to an order of the President of the Civil Tribunal of the Seine, in the office of M<sup>e</sup> Damaison, notary, domiciled in Paris, on the 30th day of March of the same year, Paul Barras, a former member of the Directorate, willed as follows :

“ I give and bequeath to M. Rousselin de Saint-Albin a copy of *Anacharsis*, and my geographical maps. Moreover, it is my desire that my papers and Memoirs, which are deposited with one of my friends, be delivered to him, in order that he shall edit the Memoirs, which I have not had time to edit myself. . . .”

On the morning of the 29th of January, 1829, Barras, feeling his end approaching (he died the same day at his residence, No. 70 Rue de Chaillot), summoned to his side his godson, M. Paul Grand. “ Fearing that the civil power might seize his papers, in order to destroy the evidence of facts undoubtedly objectionable to the Government of the day, and more especially a correspondence which had taken place between him and Louis XVIII., and having special grounds for his fears owing to the recent seizure of the papers of Cambacérès, Barras, a few moments before his death, thought it advisable to take all necessary steps to prevent a like proceeding. . . . He imparts his fears to Paul Grand, and urgently requests him to take the neces-

sary measures to prevent his political papers falling into the hands of the civil power. . . .”<sup>1</sup>

Barras having breathed his last at eleven o'clock that night, his papers were hastily crammed into two large trunks, which Mme. de Barras, M. Paul Grand, and Courtot, at one time the house-steward of the ex-director, and subsequently his confidential man, deposited in the domicile of M. de Saint-Albin during the course of the same night.

The precaution was not a useless one, for on the following day, 30th January, 1829, a justice of peace, accompanied by his clerk, made his appearance at the domicile of the deceased in order to affix the seals. This magistrate was acting pursuant to an order of the Attorney for the Crown, bearing date 15th July, 1825. At that date already the health of Barras was badly shaken, and the Minister of Justice, M. de Peyronnet, “having learned that M. Barras was very ill, and aware that he was in possession of governmental papers, notably autograph letters emanating from Louis XVIII., had instructed the Attorney for the Crown to cause the seals to be affixed, when the time should come, on all such papers of Barras like to be of interest to the Government.”<sup>2</sup>

A certain number of documents, particularly letters of the time of the Republic, were sealed, in spite of the protests of Mme. de Barras and the friends of the ex-director, who pointed out to the justice of the peace that he had no right to act by virtue of an order given four years before by a Minister who had since then gone out of office.

This seizure gave rise to a lawsuit brought by Mme. de Barras against the State<sup>3</sup>—a lawsuit which she lost in part,

<sup>1</sup> Extract from a memorandum laid by M. Paul Grand before the First Chamber of the *Tribunal de Première Instance*, 25th February, 1833.

<sup>2</sup> Attempted seizure of the political papers of the ex-director Barras; an opinion in regard to it delivered to M. Pierre Grand, an advocate pleading in the Royal Court, and concurred in by other counsel. Paris, 1829, to be had from Delaforest, bookseller.

<sup>3</sup> The interesting pleadings which took place on this occasion will be found in the numbers of the *Gazette des Tribunaux* of 28th February and 7th March, 1829.

in spite of the fact that the most eminent pleaders or juriconsults of the period—Isambert, Barthe, Chaix d'Est-Ange, Coffinières, Odillon Barrot, Renouard, and others—concurred, with all the weight of their authority based on reasons duly set forth in the opinion to which reference has been made, wherein Pierre Grand, brother of Barras's godson, declared illegal and arbitrary this affixing of the seals to the papers of a man who for over thirty years had held no office from the State, and whom, moreover, his quality of director had made "neither functionary nor public depository." Consequently the greater portion of the documents placed under seal remained in the possession of the Government, and are apparently the documents found in the Tuileries by the commission intrusted with the duty of making an abstract of the papers of King Louis Philippe after the Revolution of 1848, and which were returned to the Saint-Albin family on its petition based on the testament itself of the former member of the Directorate.

However this may be, the portion of Barras's papers most important, both from their number and the nature of their contents, had escaped the search of the Government of the Restoration, which for four years had been on the lookout for these documents, and, having found some few of them, perhaps left designedly in the domicile of the deceased in order to throw the searchers off the track, doubtless believed that it had laid hands on everything. While the lawsuit referred to was going on, and the Liberal party in a body was making a great noise in regard to the arbitrary act perpetrated by the Ministers of Charles X., M. Rousselin de Saint-Albin was quietly getting ready to fulfil the mission intrusted to him by his friend, and the Revolution of July, 1830, occurring a few months subsequent to the events just narrated, allowed him to devote himself to his task without danger of molestation.

## II.—GENUINENESS OF THE MEMOIRS OF BARRAS

A certain contradiction will doubtless have been noticed in the words used in the testament of Barras in regard to

his Memoirs. If one refers only to the beginning of the sentence, "It is my desire that my papers and Memoirs . . ." one is tempted to come to the conclusion that there existed at the time of the death of the ex-director Memoirs written by him in a complete form. But, on the other hand, the words "in order that he shall edit the Memoirs, which I have not had time to edit myself . . ." might lead one to infer that the Memoirs for so long known, although unpublished to the present day, under the name of *Mémoires de Barras* have been falsely sheltered under his name, that they do not perhaps embody the exact expression of his ideas in regard to the events of which they treat, and that they are consequently to be classed with the long list of apocryphal Memoirs. The first point to be examined, therefore, is the genuineness of the Memoirs about to be submitted to the reader.

In a long manuscript statement laid in 1833 before the president of the *Tribunal Civil de Première Instance* (district court) of the Seine, at the time of the suit — whereof more anon — between MM. Rousselin de Saint-Albin and Paul Grand in regard to the publication of the Memoirs of Barras, M. Paul Grand expressed himself as follows:

"Bonaparte had fallen, and Barras, although it cannot be said that he had the protection of the new dynasty, was not yet persecuted by it, was enjoying the quietness of privacy, as he himself admits. He was preparing to put into shape the documents in his possession, classify them, and connect them with one another; *he even began a draft on the basis of which they were to be edited, for the purpose of facilitating the publication of the Memoirs he intended bringing out . . . His notes were in part gathered together:* there remained to create from these notes an historical entity, to make a narrative of the facts, and deduce therefrom such arguments as should serve to establish the justification of himself, for the purpose of which these Memoirs were conceived.<sup>1</sup> There remained to bring into

<sup>1</sup> In a species of manifesto dated 20th June, 1819, and entitled "General Barras to his Fellow-citizens," the former member of the Directorate announced in the following terms his intention of composing his Memoirs:



play the various personages who were to appear, to give life to the whole, and lastly to clothe these notes in suitable language. Barras, in consequence of his age and the poor state of his health, shattered by political worry and sorrows, little accustomed, moreover, to write and to put into practice the rules of rhetoric which his serious occupations may well have made him forget, resolved upon trusting to friends what was dearest to his heart—the editing which he had facilitated by his work and his notes. . . .”

In another document relating to the same matter M. Paul Grand has said :

“ *Barras wrote himself a number of notes in relation to the principal passages of the projected Memoirs, in order that, should time not be left to him to put the finishing touches to them and weave them into a complete whole, he might intrust to a friend the perfecting and final editing of them.*”

The same idea is expressed more positively and clearly in a summons addressed by M. Paul Grand to M. R. de Saint-Albin: “. . . The Memoirs of Barras have already been edited by Barras himself during his lifetime: *the work to be done no longer consists but in a classification, a grouping in order of his manuscript.* . . .”

I saw M. Paul Grand in 1885, and had a conversation with him. He was at that time about eighty years old. Age had nowise dimmed his intellectual faculties, and his recollections of things and men in regard to which I was desirous of consulting him were most clear and distinct. On

“ There has just appeared under the caption of *Souvenirs et Anecdotes Secrètes* a work against which I am compelled to protest publicly. . . . Some day perhaps, if my health, shattered by so many vicissitudes, leaves me the faculty . . . I shall perhaps endeavor to render to my fellow-citizens the moral account owed them by men who have handled the affairs of State in most difficult times; but previous to publishing my *Memoirs*, I have considered it my duty not to delay recording a denial, in order to establish a most important fact. . . .”

This manifesto, of four pages of print, constitutes a portion, like all other documents I shall call in as evidence without specifying in any particular way their origin, of the papers left by M. Rousselin de Saint-Albin. It was published in several newspapers of the period.

my asking him questions as to the origin and composing of the Memoirs, as to Barras himself, whose faithful friend he had been, M. Paul Grand most courteously gave me all the information I was in quest of. He assured me that actual Memoirs were in existence at the death of Barras, the work of the former director himself, dictated, nay edited, by himself in fragmentary form. It will be noticed that this assertion agrees entirely with the one made by M. Paul Grand fifty years earlier in the documents previously quoted by me, but unknown to me at the time I had the honor of visiting him.

Should this testimony not be considered sufficient, I can adduce still more. I have before me a letter addressed to M. Rousselin de Saint-Albin by the Countess de Pelet, *née* Thermidor Tallien, dated 12th June, 1829. "My father," she writes, "had intrusted to M. Barras important notes touching events which both of them had witnessed or taken a part in. These notes, in my father's handwriting, were handed to M. Barras, in order that he might derive from them information *most useful to him in editing his Memoirs,*" etc.

An autograph letter, without date, from Barras himself to M. de Saint-Albin: "Greeting, my dear Alexander. *I send you the manuscript and the notes which I have hurriedly dictated.* You will rectify them and edit them ere making use of them. You will also receive the two volumes of Napoleon<sup>1</sup> replete with impudent falsehoods and the servility of his valets. . . ."

A letter, dated 30th August, 1830, addressed to the same from Courtot: ". . . I strongly advise you to issue *the Memoirs such as they came from the lips of the author,* with the exception of such modifications in the style as you shall see fit to make. . . ." Another letter from the same to the same, dated 19th September, 1831: ". . . It seems to me that the time has come for us to publish the *Memoirs of the unfortunate general.* . . . I am of opinion that no pri-

<sup>1</sup> *Suite au Mémorial Sainte-Hélène*, doubtless, by Grille and Musset-Pathay. Paris, 1824, 2 vols. 8vo.

vate consideration should be permitted to stand in the way of the printing of so piquant a work. . . . The Memoirs of the general will constitute an historical monument from which all will come and draw information about the Revolution, and the facts connected with it. . . ."

A letter from M. Abeille, mayor of the commune of Ampus (Var), to M. Rousselin de Saint-Albin, dated 5th November, 1830: "I am impatiently waiting to read *the Memoirs of my late uncle*. . . ."

A letter from Pierre Grand, an advocate pleading in the royal court, to M. Rousselin de Saint-Albin, dated 24th August, 1831: ". . . Depository of the papers of Barras, you hold the documents affording the most convincing proofs that he ever remained faithful to the principles which made him a director. . . . For a long time past the country has been demanding the Memoirs of Barras solemnly promised to it. It is more than two years and a half ago since I made the announcement in the Paris courts that the Memoirs of Barras were to appear ere long. . . . A citizen, I exclaimed before them, Barras was fulfilling a citizen's duty *when dictating pages* which will soon constitute history. . . ."

In conclusion, I am able to invoke a final bit of evidence, one absolutely decisive in my eyes. I have found in the papers of M. Rousselin de Saint-Albin a *chemise* (envelope for filing papers) containing a number of manuscript sheets covered with the indecipherable handwriting of Barras. The perusal of these sheets, as well as all others that have likewise come into my possession, proves beyond doubt that they are in part mere notes, in part actual fragments in complete form. The *chemise* is indorsed in the handwriting of M. Rousselin de Saint-Albin: "*Barras's uninterrupted narrative from the 18th Brumaire to 1828. Special events.*" And above this: "*Used.*"

The genuineness of the Memoirs of Barras cannot therefore be called into question. These Memoirs, projected as early as 1819 by the ex-director, were the object of his constant solicitude during the last ten years of his life. He gathered together the materials for them himself—himself

he wrote or dictated notes more or less lengthy which were to serve for the final editing of them. Those about him knew that he was engaged in this work; they announced its forthcoming publication, which was looked forward to with impatience, as it was expected to contain "piquant" revelations about the men and events of the Revolution, and especially as destined to make a crushing reply to the attacks directed against the former member of the Directorate. Owing to what concatenation of circumstances have these Memoirs, famed ere they ever appeared, remained unpublished up to the present time? This, then, remains to be elucidated.

### III.—DISPUTES BETWEEN MM. ROUSSELIN DE SAINT-ALBIN AND PAUL GRAND IN REGARD TO THE PUBLICATION OF THE MEMOIRS OF BARRAS

In a codicil dated 30th September, 1827, Barras had added to his testament the following clause: "M. de Saint-Albin will take as his coadjutor for the editing of my Memoirs M. Paul Grand, subject to the orders of my wife, each of them to receive a sum proportionate to the legacy bequeathed to him from the profits arising from the sale of the Memoirs; Courtot to share in such profits."

This disposition gave rise to long-drawn-out disputes between the four persons whom it concerned.

The papers of Barras delivered to M. R. de Saint-Albin a few hours after the ex-director had breathed his last were composed of a considerable number of documents—autograph letters from generals, political men, celebrated personages, reports, documents of all kinds: some preserved by Barras when he retired into private life in 1799, others collected by him subsequently in view of the composition of his Memoirs, as attested by the letter above quoted of a daughter of Tallien. If M. Paul Grand is to be believed, the number of these documents was some 15,000. In addition to these precious documents, the two large trunks deposited with M. R. de Saint-Albin on the