MEMOIRS

OF

NAPOLEON,

HIS COURT, AND FAMILY.

INTRODUCTION.

Every body nowadays publishes Memoirs; every one has recollections which they think worthy of recording. Following the example of many others, I might long ago have taken a retrospective view of the past; I might have revealed a number of curious and unknown facts respecting a period which has rivetted the interest of the world; but the truth is, I was not until recently, infected with the mania, which is so universal of memoir writing. I felt a certain degree of vexation, whenever I observed an announcement of new memoirs.

I entered into life at a period fertile in remarkable events, and I lived in habits of daily intimacy with the actors of the great political drama which has engrossed the attention of Europe for thirty-five years. It will therefore be difficult for me to refrain from speaking of individuals, when events bring them forward on the scene. This will be disagreeable, but I cannot help it.

I have witnessed, and have even been engaged in many of the agitated scenes which occurred during an epoch of wonder and horror; and though I was at the time very young, every incident remains indelibly engraven on my memory. The importance of events, on which the fate of a great nation depended, could not fail to influence the bent of my mind. This influence, I imagine, must have been felt by all women who have been my contemporaries. With regard to myself, at least, I can confidently affirm that I retain no recollection of the joys of early childhood; of the light-heartedness, which at that period of
life annihilated sorrow, and leaves behind an imperishable impression. No sooner did my understanding begin to develop itself, than I was required to employ it in guarding all my words and gestures: for at the period to which I allude, the veriest trifle might become the subject of serious investigation. Even the sports and games of childhood were rigorously watched, and I shall never forget that a domiciliary visit was made to our house at Toulouse, and my father was on the point of being arrested, because, while playing at the game called *La Tour, prenks garde!* I said to a little boy of five years old, "You shall be Monsieur le Dauphin." Continual danger imposed on every individual the obligation of not only guarding his own conduct, but observing that of others. Nothing, however trifling, was a matter of indifference to the heads of families, and those who surrounded them; and the child of ten years old became an observer. It was in the midst of these torments that the first years of my youth were passed: later education resumed its course, and a mother of a family ceased to tremble for the fate of a father and a husband. At the period to which I refer, the misfortunes of France were at their height. The impressions which I then imbibed are perhaps the strongest I ever experienced. Hitherto my eye and my ear had been attentive; I observed and listened with avidity. The nature of my education no doubt contributed to strengthen my mind. My studies were not of a superficial kind, but were those usually allotted to young men. My father, who loved me tenderly, had me educated in his own house, and under his own superintendence.

It has frequently been said that the revolution had a fatal influence on education. This is untrue. One branch of education, viz., *good manners*, certainly experienced a check from which it will not easily recover. This is unfortunate. The want of that courtesy and urbanity, which conferred on France the reputation of the politest of nations, is perhaps an obstacle to those intimate relations which unite together the different parts of society. I therefore regard the loss of that politeness which once distinguished us, as a matter of more importance than it is sometimes considered, vulgarity and impertinence have replaced it, without even frankness and generosity to render them pardonable. On the other hand, education has gained materially by the total change it has undergone. No doubt the revolutionary turmoil of 1793 and 1794 threw impediments in the way of private education. On the important subject of religious instruction, for example, great difficulties were experienced; every one educated in the schools suffered in this respect, but parents themselves (I speak here of the general mass) instilled the first principles of religion into the minds of their children.
advantages of universities and public schools, it is certain that a career was opened to them much more fertile in its results, than was the old-fashioned routine of instruction pursued by the minim monks in their colleges. In those days of trouble and disaster, the rising generation, who were frequently obliged to brave death, proscription, and misery, and on whose prudence frequently depended the lives of all who were dear to them, received instructive lessons from the appalling events which passed before their eyes. Women, too, acquired a degree of prudence and a spirit of observation which were highly useful to them in every relation of life; and they learned the value of that real talent and solid information which could be turned to useful account in earning a livelihood. Young men imbibed a hatred of oppression, a love of glory, and a contempt of death, which rendered them invincible; they acquired a knowledge of their own rights and of those of their country. With these men, Bonaparte conquered Italy: with these men he marched to regenerate ancient Egypt. One of them commanded and fell at Novi when he had scarcely completed his thirtieth year, while in Paris a young man of the same age was thought worthy to preside in the convention.

About this period the private interests of my family became, as it were, linked with the public interests. Between my mother and the Bonaparte family the closest friendship subsisted. He who afterwards became the master of the world, lived long on a footing of intimacy with us. He used to frequent my father’s house when I was yet a child, and he scarcely a young man. I may almost say that I have witnessed every scene of his life; for being married to one of those men who were devotedly attached to him, and constantly with him, what I did not myself see I was accurately informed of. I may therefore fearlessly affirm, that of all the individuals who have written about Napoleon, few are so competent as myself to give a detailed account of him. My mother, who was the friend of Léaetitia Bonaparte, knew him from his earliest youth. She rocked him in his cradle, and, when he quitted Brienne and came to Paris, she guided and protected his younger days. Not only Napoleon, but his brothers and sisters formed part of our family. I shall presently speak of the friendship which arose between myself and Napoleon’s sisters, a friendship which one of them has entirely forgotten. When my mother quitted Corsica to follow my father to France, the friendly relations which subsisted between her and the Bonaparte family suffered no change by absence or distance. The conduct of my parents towards Bonaparte, the father, when he came to Montpellier with his son and his brother-in-law, to die far from his country and all that was dear to him, should never be forgotten by either of the two families. It should be remembered by the one with gratitude, and by the other with that feeling of satisfaction which the performance of a good action creates. The
other members of the Bonaparte family were also favourites of my mother. Lucien found in her more than a common friend. When he formed that strange union with Mademoiselle Boyer, my mother received his wife as her own daughter. Of our intimacy with Madame Joseph Bonaparte and Madame Leclerc, the details into which I shall enter in the course of these volumes will afford an accurate idea. My husband’s connexion with Bonaparte commenced with the siege of Toulon, and from that time they continued united until Junot’s death. Thus, I may say, that without having been always near Bonaparte, I possessed the most authentic means of being accurately informed of every action, private or public. It will be understood by what I have here stated, that while I pretend to be the only person who perfectly well knew every particularity of Napoleon, it is not mere presumption that prompts me to say so; the details which will be found in the following pages I derive from other sources than those which usually feed biographical sketches.

I shall commence this work by some details respecting my family and some distinguished individuals, such as Paoli, at the time when he diffused a ray of light upon his barbarous country. I shall relate my conversations (of which I kept memoranda) with M.M. de Romansoff, Markoff, Kalischeff, and Dirschkoff, who enjoyed the intimacy of the Czarina,* and acquainted me with the real causes of the Greek insurrection of 1770. As my family took an active part in the events of that period, I cannot be altogether acquainted with them.

I shall speak of Corsica, the adopted country of the family of Comnene, and of the Greek origin of the Bonaparte family. The tomb of the Giant of glory rivets the interest of the world, therefore his birthplace cannot be a matter of indifference. The first part of these Memoirs will describe the dawn of that revolution, to all the vicissitudes of which I was a witness. Perhaps it will be said that I was too young to observe and to retain in my memory all that passed at that period. I have already said, that being a passenger on board the vessel that was continually tossed by the storm, the least movement and the track it was taking were to me a constant source of reflection. I repeat once more, that in those times we had no ordinary youth. Another part of these volumes will comprise a terrible moment of my existence, that sanguinary period when the French people seemed for awhile to vie in ferocity with the wild beasts of the desert. But the military flag soon rallied under its protecting shade the honour and glory of France; and with magical rapidity the triumph of her arms was witnessed on the banks of the Rhine.

* The Abbé Perrin, who resided for many years in the house of Count Panim, to whose children he was tutor, furnished me with a number of details respecting the barbarous court of Russia, the death of Peter and Paul, and other affairs of high interest, which might appear incredible if they rested on any
on the summit of the Alps; in the marshes of Holland, on the lake of Zurich, and, above all, on the plains of Italy. Victory accompanied our armies, and wheresoever they went, their track was marked by their blood. I am proud to say, that the blood which flows in the veins of my sons was not spared by their father in the service of his country. But those days, so brilliant in our camps, were dull and gloomy in our cities; the latter were a prey to civil dissension. The terror of massacre had been succeeded by a terror no less frightful, produced by the continual conflict between anarchy and power. The termination of this conflict was the more doubtful, for anarchy was fostered in an element but too favourable to its growth, while on the other hand, power, which was almost always usurped by force, and never delegated by a reasonable majority, could neither be awarded nor exercised without a struggle. Such contests always terminate in convulsions, and how many have we not seen! How often, when listening to the discussions which were maintained around me, have I heard the destruction of my unfortunate country predicted! Alas! France was doomed to linger out a longer career of misfortune! What was done one day was undone the next; but it is not so easy to build up as to pull down, and in France the truth of this commonplace proverb was forcibly verified. Next succeeded the directorial reign; that monstrous union of anarchy, tyranny, and weakness. I saw those Pasquin Kings, in whose hands the sceptre was a mere club, with which they struck until the blow became a wound. Their reign terminated, the consulate marked the dawn of a new era, and France once more rose from amidst wreck and ruin. Next came the days of the empire, that great and prodigious wonder! Doubtless the true republican regretted his invaded rights; but where is the French heart that does not beat at the recollection of that era of glory—on hearing the names of those men who marched to battle as they would go to a fête—who purchased a victory by a scar, and proclaimed France the mistress of nations from the Vistula to the Tagus? Thus I beheld the star of our prosperity at its summit; I saw it wave into obscurity, reappear and sink a second time. During these changes my heart has been often afflicted; I have suffered deeply, and my silent sorrow has been more bitter than the loud despair of many others. However, it was even some gratification to French pride to see all Europe advancing to crush a sovereign, of whom but a few days previously it had been the slave.

In preparing these Memoirs how many past recollections have revived! how many dormant griefs have awakened! In spite of the general fidelity of my memory, I occasionally met with dates and facts, the remembrance of which, though not effaced, had faded by the course of time. They were speedily restored; but I must confess that my task has been a laborious and painful one, and that I have been led far from my former purpose.
its execution but the conviction that it must be done. It may perhaps be alleged that I could have answered in a pamphlet of fifty pages, all that has been said: I at first thought of doing so, but I found this impracticable. In taking up the pen my object was to make a complete, not a summary refutation of the untruths that have been advanced. This could not be done in a few lines. It is not my intention to criminate any one: I shall merely state facts, and all shall be supported by written evidence. The autographic documents which I have deposited in the hands of my editor will be open to those who may wish to examine them. Among the attacks aimed at the Duke d’Abrantes, there is one of a very absurd nature. The assailant’s memory betrayed him, and by a fortunate chance a letter in his own handwriting falsifies what he has said in his book: there is perhaps nothing more venomous than the sting of ridicule. With regard to what concerns me and my family in the Mémorial de Sainte-Hélène, I conceive myself in duty bound to reply to it. I have always viewed as the height of absurdity that pride, which is founded on an origin more or less illustrious. But if that pride be ridiculous, the usurpation of a great name, a false pretension to noble descent, is the extreme of baseness. Such being my opinion, it will readily be conceived that I am not inclined to pass over in silence that chapter in the Mémorial de Sainte-Hélène, which treats of the family of my mother. I will prove that my grandfather and my uncles, far from setting up false claims to family greatness, wished on the contrary to extinguish a noble name, which, when stripped of the splendour with which it ought to be surrounded, becomes to its possessors a source of annoyance and humiliation. Such was the intention of my grandfather, the last privileged chief of the Greek colony, a shadow of sovereignty, and a toy with which he wished to have no more concern.

He had but one daughter, who was my mother, and he made her vow never to consent to the reassumption of her family name, a vow which I am sure my mother would have religiously kept to this day had she lived. My grandfather died a young man. He was captain of cavalry in the French service (in the regiment de Vallière), a noble Corsican, and not a farmer, as the Mémorial de Sainte-Hélène asserts. As to obtaining an acknowledgment of the dignity of the Comnene family, he entertained no such idea. My grandfather died in 1768, and the family was acknowledged in 1782; the letters patent are dated 1783 and 1784.

I know not if I have expressed the motives which have actuated me to publish this work: they are however pure and honourable. I consider the publication of these Memoirs to be a duty to my family, and above all to the memory of my husband. Often during political storms a veil is thrown over some part of