

HAROLD WHEELER

THE STORY OF
NAPOLEON

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Harold F. B. Wheeler

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*'There was an eye to see in this man, a soul to dare
and do. He rose naturally to be the King. All men saw
that he was such.'*

Carlyle

Foreword

There is no more marvellous story in human history than that of Napoleon I., Emperor of the French. His career is one long demonstration of the reality of the proverb, "Truth is stranger than fiction." So fascinating are the details of a life in which so much was attempted and accomplished that many thousands of volumes have been published dealing with its various phases. The demand is by no means exhausted, the supply continuous, as witness the present work. Busy pens are still employed in reviewing the almost superhuman activities of the once obscure Corsican, whose genius for war and conquest upset many a throne, secured for him the Overlordship of Europe, and eventually consigned him to an island prison. Indeed, there seems little likelihood of a lull in interest while the chief source of instruction and amusement of human nature is humanity—in other words itself. Most of us are content to be pupils in the school of experience, willing to sit at the feet of such a master as Napoleon, and learn the lessons he has to teach. The result cannot be other than profitable.

Napoleon has been dead nearly ninety years, but the dazzling brilliancy of his exploits has left a rich afterglow which enables us to get a much less distorted view of him than were our forefathers who were his contemporaries. A subdued light is more useful than one so strong that it almost blinds. With the former we

can see details more distinctly, note faults and flaws if there be any, get a clearer idea of an object in every way. Within living memory the name of Napoleon, particularly in Great Britain, was associated with everything that was base and vile, now we know that he was neither the Borgia of his enemies nor the Arch-Patriot of his friends. Nevertheless it is easier for a sightless person to thread a needle than for the most conscientious historian to arrive at an absolutely just summing-up of the case. The "Memoirs" of those with whom the Emperor was intimately acquainted are seldom impartial; the majority of the writers are either definitely for or against him. Take those of Baron Méneval as a typical example. The author was one of Napoleon's secretaries, and every page of his work is a defence of his master. In the matter of the execution of the Duc d'Enghien, for instance, he takes up the cudgels on behalf of the man who was responsible for the tragedy at Vincennes, boldly stating that "One is forced to admit that Napoleon fulfilled a painful duty, as Head of the Government, and that instead of charging him with a crime, one should rather pity him for having been placed in the necessity of accepting all the odium of an act, the deplorable consequences of which, in the future, his foresight only too clearly pointed out to him."

Far from Napoleon being concerned as to probable political consequences, he asserted it would teach the Bourbons a lesson. On the other hand, the "Memoirs" of Barras, a prominent figure in the French Revolution, might have been of considerable service to us in gathering information as to Bonaparte's early

career, had it not been proved beyond question that much he tells us is sheer bare-faced untruth, and he everywhere seeks to belittle the accomplishments of the young soldier.

“Bonaparte, on the 13th of Vendémiaire,” he says, “performed no functions but those of an aide-de-camp of mine. I was on horseback, he was on foot; he could not follow my movements. The only order he received from me was to go to the Pont Royal, and to report to me what was taking place. He did not give, and had not to give, a single order, and was seen at only one point of the attack, at the Carrousel. He did not stir from thence; Brune was in command.” The statements of Thiébault, Marmont, and many others prove beyond question that Napoleon, and he alone, saved the day.

Books which unduly eulogise or condemn should be read therefore with a certain amount of reserve. Of partisans such as Jung there are many, and they doubtless fulfil a useful purpose provided always that a representative of the other side is given a similar hearing. Lanfrey, whose vitriolic volumes may be perused in English, represents a school of thought which has no place in an age which refuses to listen or to read only of the evil in a man.

Special attention has been paid in the present work to the genesis of Napoleon's career, because it is in what is known as the formative period that we plant the seeds of future success. To-day and to-morrow are inextricably interblended, although we so often fail to appreciate what is assuredly one of the most vital

facts of life. Periods of time are no more real boundaries than periods of history, which are merely make-believe divisions for purposes of clearness and reference. Of course, one reign may be more enlightened than another, one Statesman may confer more benefits on his country than his predecessor, but there is always a previous foundation on which to build. Napoleon did not create his vast Empire from nothing. A mosaic-worker who is given a pile of vari-coloured marble chips with which to glorify a cathedral pavement does not disdain the fragments because they are in confusion and appear of little worth. With infinite patience and skill he sorts them into their various grades, then combines them again, but giving each its proper order in the scheme. Presently from apparent chaos he produces a work of beauty. Napoleon came on the scene when the giant upheaval known as the French Revolution had thrown the whole nation out of gear. He brought the scattered masses together, recreated Government and the army, made laws, re-established religion—in a word, led the people back from anarchy and savagery to civilisation and order. Napoleon's true place in history is as an organiser. Conqueror he undoubtedly was, and his overgrown ambition in this direction was the cause of his downfall. Had he chosen to rule France solely all would have been well; neighbouring nations could not have raised legitimate objections. As it was they owe a debt of gratitude to him. Although no part of his scheme to awaken dormant ideals of nationality and of liberty, he unwittingly did so in the archaic Holy Roman Empire, Italy,

Spain, and Tyrol, to mention the more important. A century ago, Europe hated the Man of Destiny, and not without cause; to-day, she has every reason, if not to revere his memory, to be thankful for having felt the iron grip of Napoleon. Surgical operations are extremely painful whether individual or national.

Napoleon cannot be called a "good" man in the usually accepted sense of so latitudinarian a word. He was the instigator of more than one political crime, yet he had a heart that could beat for the afflicted; he would say the most unkind and cruel things of Sir Hudson Lowe, to whose care he was committed at St Helena, and play at bears with little Betsy Balcombe during her stay in the same island. So complex a personality must necessarily defy to a great extent the set-square and compasses both of panegyrist and detractor. Guided by no standard code of morality, he created his own, that of expediency. "No name," says Lord Rosebery, "represents so completely and conspicuously dominion, splendour and catastrophe. He raised himself by the use, and ruined himself by the abuse, of superhuman faculties. He was wrecked by the extravagance of his own genius. No less powers than those which had effected his rise could have achieved his fall."

In a book limited to a certain number of pages many phases of a crowded life such as Napoleon's must necessarily receive somewhat scant treatment. It has been found impossible to treat military events in full, but the general outlines of the various campaigns have been given, and the narratives of first-hand

authorities quoted whenever practicable. For general reading a description of a battle by a man who was present is always to be preferred to the minute details of the most painstaking student.

As regards authorities, special reference must be made to Volume IX. of the monumental "Cambridge Modern History," Dr J. Holland Rose's just and impartial "Life of Napoleon I.," Sir John Seeley's somewhat disparaging "Short History of Napoleon the First," Mr F. Loraine Petre's masterly studies of the Polish, Prussian, and Austrian campaigns, Sir Archibald Alison's "History of Europe," which has by no means lost its usefulness since more modern research has added to our knowledge of the epoch, Mr Oscar Browning's interesting "Boyhood and Youth of Napoleon, 1769-1793," and Mr Hereford B. George's "Napoleon's Invasion of Russia." A host of other volumes dealing with the same inexhaustible subject which line the shelves of my crowded library have also been utilised, I trust, to good purpose.

When the late Admiral Eden was a senior midshipman he was told by his Admiral that he should accompany him on a visit to the fallen Emperor at St Helena. "We waited for Napoleon in an outer room," he afterwards told a friend, "and you must imagine how eagerly I expected his entrance. The door was thrown open at last, and in he came. He was short and fat, and nothing very attractive but for his eye! My word, sir, I had never seen anything like it.

"After speaking to the Admiral he turned to me, and then I understood for the first time in my life, what was the meaning

of the phrase ‘A born ruler of men.’ I had been taught to hate the French as I hated the devil; but when Napoleon looked at me there was such power and majesty in his look that if he had bade me lie down that he might walk over me, I would have done it at once, Englishman although I was. The look on Napoleon’s face was the revelation of the man and the explanation of his power. He was born to command.”

And there you have part of the secret of Napoleon’s career.

HAROLD F. B. WHEELER

CHAPTER I

Napoleon the Boy

(1769–1778)

Whenever we hear the name of Napoleon mentioned, or see it printed in a book, it is usually in connection with a hard-fought victory on the battlefield. He certainly spent most of his life in the camp, and enjoyed the society of soldiers more than that of courtiers. The thunder of guns, the charge of cavalry, and the flash of bayonets as they glittered in the sun, appealed to him with much the same force as music to more ordinary folk. Indeed, he himself tells us that “the cries of the dying, the tears of the hopeless, surrounded my cradle from the moment of my birth.”

We are apt to forget that this mighty conqueror, whom Carlyle calls “our last great man,” had a childhood at all. He was born nearly a century and a half ago, on the 15th August 1769 to be exact, in the little town of Ajaccio, the capital of picturesque Corsica. This miniature island rises a bold tree-covered rock in the blue waters of the Mediterranean, fifty miles west of the coast of Italy. It had been sold to France by the Republic of Genoa the previous year, but the inhabitants had fought for their independence with praiseworthy determination. Then civil war broke out, and the struggle finally ended three months before the

birth of the boy who was to become the ruler of the conquering nation. The Corsicans had their revenge in time, although in a way very different from what they could have expected.

Letizia Bonaparte, Napoleon's mother, was as beautiful as she was energetic, and her famous son never allowed anyone to speak ill of her. "My excellent mother," said he, not long before his death, "is a woman of courage and of great talent ... she is capable of doing everything for me," and he added that the high position which he attained was due largely to the careful way in which she brought him up.

"It is to my mother, to her good precepts and upright example, that I owe my success and any great thing I have accomplished," he averred, while to a general he remarked, "My mother was a superb woman, a woman of ability and courage." A truly great man always speaks well of his mother.

Napoleon was Letizia's fourth child, two having died in infancy, while Joseph, the surviving son, was still unable to toddle when the latest addition to the family was in his cradle. His father was a happy-go-lucky kind of man of good ancestry, a lawyer by profession, who on the landing of the French had resigned the pen for the sword. He enlisted in the army raised by Pascal Paoli to defend the island, for the Corsicans were then a very warlike people and much sought after as soldiers, and it is supposed by some that he acted as Paoli's secretary. It is certain that the patriot showed him marked favour, which was never repaid.

When Paoli and his loyal band were forced to make their

escape to the hospitable shores of England, Charles Bonaparte meekly accepted the pardon offered to those who would lay down their arms and acknowledge Louis XV. of France as their King. After events proved the wisdom of his choice, but scarcely justified his action.

The house in which the Bonaparte family lived at Ajaccio is still standing, but has been patched up and repaired so frequently that probably little of the original fabric remains. It now belongs to the ex-Empress Eugénie, the consort of Napoleon's ill-fated nephew who is known to history as Napoleon III. You would not call it a mansion, and yet it contains a spacious ballroom, a large square drawing-room, Charles Bonaparte's study, a dining-room, a nursery, several bedrooms, and a dressing-room. Some of the old furniture is left, namely the Chippendale sofa on which the future Emperor was born, his mother's spinet, and his father's desk. There is also a little etching of Napoleon on horseback by the late Prince Imperial, and one or two statuettes and portraits. In the Town Hall near by is a picture of Letizia which testifies to her good looks—she was known as “the beauty of Ajaccio!”

As a child Napoleon was impetuous, self-confident, and apt to be bad-tempered. If a playmate did something which displeased him the culprit was rewarded with kicks, bites and scratches. Letizia did her best to break him of this bad habit, with little success, for he resented interference to the end of his days. When he was Emperor he used to tell an anecdote of his early life which proves that his mother did more than scold him when he got into

mischief.

There were some fig-trees in the garden attached to his home, and Napoleon was very fond of climbing them. Letizia, fearing an accident, forbade him to do so. "One day, however," he relates, "when I was idle, and at a loss for something to do, I took it in my head to long for some of those figs. They were ripe; no one saw me, or could know anything of the matter. I made my escape, ran to the tree, and gathered the whole. My appetite being satisfied, I was providing for the future by filling my pockets, when an unlucky gardener came in sight. I was half-dead with fear, and remained fixed on the branch of the tree, where he had surprised me. He wished to seize me and take me to my mother. Despair made me eloquent; I represented my distress, promised to keep away from the figs in future, and he seemed satisfied. I congratulated myself on having come off so well, and fancied that the adventure would never be known; but the traitor told all. The next day my mother wanted to go and gather some figs. I had not left any, there was none to be found: the gardener came, great reproaches followed, and an exposure." The result was a thrashing!

Probably the busy housewife taught Napoleon his letters, assisted by his uncle Joseph Fesch, who was but six years his senior, while from his great uncle, Archdeacon Lucien Bonaparte, he learned a little Bible history. The three "R.'s" were drilled into him by nuns, and as the establishment admitted girls as well as boys, Napoleon took a fancy to one of the former,

thereby incurring the ridicule of some of his schoolfellows. They were never tired of jeering at him with a little rhyme, specially composed for the occasion, to the effect that "Napoleon with his stockings half off makes love to Giacommetta." The translation, of course, does not jingle as in the Corsican patois. It must not be inferred that he was a good-looking or attractive boy. On the contrary, he had a sallow complexion, was invariably untidy, and inclined to be moody.

Later, he went to a more advanced school, and from thence to the seminary of the Abbé Recco. If he was not a brilliant scholar he was certainly more interested in mathematics than is the modern boy in locomotives, and that is admitting a good deal. He also excelled in geography. Both studies proved useful *aides-de-camp* when Napoleon began to master the intricate arts of strategy and tactics. It is on record that when Napoleon was very young he rode on a high-spirited pony to a neighbouring windmill, and after persuading the miller to tell him how much corn it ground in an hour, quietly sat down and worked out the quantity used per day and week. The tyrant then returned to his panic-stricken mother, who had convinced herself that the boy had probably fallen off his fiery steed and been trampled to death.

When opportunity occurred, the youthful Napoleon scribbled sums on the nursery walls and drew crude outlines of soldiers marching in regimental order. A fondness for the open air early manifested itself, and the earnest student would remain out-of-

doors for hours at a stretch, provided he was allowed to follow his favourite pursuits without being disturbed. Should his brother dare to interfere when he was working in the little wooden shanty which his thoughtful mother had caused to be erected for him, Napoleon's hasty temper would get the upper hand, and the intruder would be forced to beat a hasty retreat, perhaps in a shower of sticks and stones.

“My brother Joseph,” he tells us, “was the one with whom I was oftenest in trouble: he was beaten, bitten, abused. I went to complain before he had time to recover from his confusion. I had need to be on the alert; our mother would have repressed my warlike humour, she would not have put up with my caprices. Her tenderness was allied with severity: she punished, rewarded all alike; the good, the bad, nothing escaped her. My father, a man of sense, but too fond of pleasure to pay much attention to our infancy, sometimes attempted to excuse our faults: ‘Let them alone,’ she replied, ‘it is not your business, it is I who must look after them.’ She did, indeed, watch over us with a solicitude unexampled. Every low sentiment, every ungenerous affection was discouraged: she suffered nothing but what was good and elevated to take root in our youthful understandings. She abhorred falsehood, was provoked by disobedience: she passed over none of our faults.”

Napoleon's father had no difficulty in deciding what profession to choose for his second son. As for Joseph, he determined that he should enter the priesthood. Napoleon was

positive his brother would make a good bishop, and said so.

In this matter of settling the life-work of his boys Charles Bonaparte was helped by the kindly-disposed Marbœuf, one of the two French commissioners appointed by the King to govern Corsica, who frequently visited the house in the Rue St Charles. Napoleon, although only nine years old was now about to enter a larger world, to have an opportunity to appreciate the benefits of education on sounder lines, and to tread the soil of the country which received him as a humble pensioner of the King, and elevated him twenty-five years later to the Imperial throne.

CHAPTER II

The Schooldays of Napoleon (1779–1784)

In France there were twelve royal military schools to which a certain number of sons of the poor aristocracy were admitted without payment. Marbœuf was successful in securing this benefit for Napoleon, although his father had to prove to the satisfaction of the authorities that he was without fortune and to present a certificate to the effect that his family had belonged to the nobility for at least four generations. This done, the way was made clear for the boy to begin his first serious studies in the art of warfare. As the Corsicans spoke Italian and knew very little, if anything, of the French language, it was decided that Napoleon should stay for a time with his brother Joseph at the College of Autun so that he might acquire some knowledge of the language both were henceforth to speak. To the end of his days Napoleon never learnt to spell correctly, his pronunciation was oftentimes peculiar, and his writing invariably abominable.

Charles Marie de Bonaparte, duly accompanied by Joseph, Napoleon, Uncle Fesch, and a cousin named Aurelio Varese, set off for the land of their adoption in the middle of December 1778. The good Letizia sobbed bitterly when she parted with her two sons, but there were now several other children to be

cared for, which must have consoled her to some extent. The travellers passed through Tuscany, where the beautiful city of Florence left an impression on the plastic mind of the embryo soldier, and a momentary sight of the Grand Duke afforded him intense pleasure. They were fragmentary foretastes of things to come, when Napoleon's troops would overrun the land of the Medici and the scions of royal houses would appreciate a nod or a glance from the now unknown lad whose eyes opened wide with astonishment at the sights and scenes of pre-Revolutionary Europe.

On the 1st January 1779, Autun was reached, and the boys had their first experience of what it means to be hundreds of miles from home and in a country where rugged little Corsica, if mentioned at all, was sneered at, and its inhabitants regarded as scarcely better than savages. Another separation came towards the end of the following April, when Napoleon left for Brienne, now inseparably associated with his name and fame. Tradition has it that Joseph wept copiously at the moment of departure, but down his brother's cheek there coursed a solitary tear. In the opinion of the Abbé Simon, who held the important post of sub-principal of the College, this was proof that Napoleon felt the wrench none the less keenly. Joseph allowed his emotions to govern him; Napoleon controlled his heart by his will, then as always.

It may be thought peculiar that Brienne, like the other military schools, was controlled by monks. The arrangement was really

not so extraordinary as it would appear. Religion, up to the time of the Revolution, had always played an important part in the State, and that great epoch-making volcano had done nothing more than rumble at the period with which we are dealing. The Superior was, of course, the head of the establishment, the various Fathers having particular subjects to teach in which they more or less excelled. Occasionally a member of the laity assisted in a subordinate capacity. Pichegru, who was to become famous in the profession of Napoleon's choice, taught the elementary class at Brienne.

The pupils lived in almost monastic seclusion. They were not allowed to leave the precincts for the whole of the six years which were allotted to them for education, and during the holidays were never quite free from lessons. What seems a most exacting régime in some ways was, however, neutralised to some extent by rules judiciously forgotten.

St Germain, the energetic Minister of War who had advised the King to found the military schools, had spent much time and thought in drawing up elaborate regulations for their government. The studies included geography, history, grammar, mathematics, Latin, French poetry, German, drawing, music, and eventually English. Special attention was paid, as was only natural, to the art of war, "the trade of barbarians," as Napoleon once termed it in a capricious moment. Although rich in promise the colleges fell far short of the high ideals which St Germain had hoped for them, as do so many plans for the improvement of the existing

order of things.

Notwithstanding all that has been written of Napoleon's morose and sullen disposition during his student days, it must not be forgotten that the young cadet was at a decided disadvantage in making friends. The matter of language alone was a sufficient barrier to intimate intercourse at this stage of his scholastic career, and his habit of diligent study ill-accommodated with the frivolous frittering away of time indulged in by so many of the King's scholars. Napoleon was a hard worker, but only in subjects which most appealed to him, such as history, geography, and mathematics, all of which had a special bearing on his future career. Latin he despised as being of no practical value to a soldier; translations he positively loathed. He early learned to eliminate the non-essential and trivial, and the easy mastery of details became almost second nature to him.

His patriotism for his own country burned like a consuming fire. It is related that one day Napoleon came across a portrait of Choiseul, the hated Minister of Foreign Affairs under Louis XV. who had been the main instigator of the seizure of Corsica by the French. The most insulting remarks were hurled at the painted presentment of the man he so detested. On another occasion it is said that he averred he would do the French as much harm as he possibly could. If the story is not legendary, the statement was doubtless made in a moment of anger; perhaps after some thoughtless fellow student had taunted him about the poverty of his family, or the downfall of Paoli, the Corsican patriot

whom he so much admired. His hot Southern blood boiled with indignation when anything was said which gave offence, and he scarcely, if ever, endeavoured to curb his hasty temper. He went so far as to challenge a cadet to a duel. To Bourrienne alone, a lad of his own age, did he show a marked attachment, and a warm friendship was cemented between them. Napoleon did not forget his school-chum in later years, and when a General appointed him to the important position of his private secretary. In his "Memoirs" Bourrienne gives us several intimate glimpses of the obscure lad who was to make Europe his footstool. He tells us that Napoleon frequently meditated on the conquest of his native island; that the unworthy part played by his father was never forgiven; that he spent much of his time in solitude. Bourrienne also confesses that in exchange for assistance in Latin the future Emperor would lend him a helping hand with his mathematics, the calculations being made with extraordinary clearness and rapidity.

"At Brienne," his school-fellow adds, "Bonaparte was remarkable for the dark colour of his complexion, which the climate of France afterwards very much changed, as well as for his piercing and scrutinising glance, and for the style of his conversation, both with his masters and companions. His conversation almost always gave one the idea of ill-humour, and he was certainly not very sociable. This I think may be attributed to the misfortunes of his family during his childhood, and the impressions made on his mind by the subjugation of his country."

In these trying days Napoleon's reticent disposition served him in good stead. He preferred the library of the school to the playground. While the other boys were enjoying a game Napoleon was usually poring over the pages of Plutarch, and deriving inspiration and encouragement from the deeds of old-time heroes who figure in the "Lives of Illustrious Men." Greek poetry had a fascination for him not evident in many lads of his tender age. "With my sword by my side," he writes to his mother, "and Homer in my pocket, I hope to carve my way through the world." Cæsar's "Gallic War" was also a favourite. Although Napoleon was by no means generally popular, and certainly never inclined to be genial, the majority of the students gradually began to respect him. It is on record that he was never a sneak, preferring to bear punishment himself rather than to divulge the name of a miscreant.

The love of monks for the soil is proverbial; this may have been the reason why a small portion of ground was allotted to each student at Brienne. Whatever healthy exercise Napoleon was supposed to derive from his garden was speedily discounted. He set to work with feverish activity, transformed the desert into an oasis, planted trees and shrubs, and surrounded the whole by a palisade in true military fashion. This done, he troubled no more about agricultural pursuits but was content to sit in his bower and read with little fear of disturbance.

In the winter of 1783-4, an abnormally severe season, the anchorite had an opportunity to show his military powers.

Napoleon suggested to the students that they should build a fort of snow complete in every detail. The school was then divided into two armies, Napoleon sometimes directing the assault, at others defending the fortifications. It was rough play, and several serious accidents befel the cadets, who entered into the spirit of the thing with more alacrity than the peace-loving monks approved. Day after day this mock warfare was kept up, and Napoleon was usually the hero of each encounter.

You can imagine him standing there in his picturesque costume: blue coat with red facings and white metal buttons, blue breeches, and a waistcoat of the same colour faced with white. Horace Vernet has depicted the scene in one of his many Napoleonic paintings. The young commander, erect and defiant, is directing the storming of the fort by cadets who, for the most part, have taken off their coats in order to secure a better aim. An attacking party is climbing the ramparts, some of the units with success, others with disaster. The picture has been reproduced many times, and is one of the few dealing with the early period of the Conqueror's career.

Without question these were the happiest days of Napoleon's youth. He was not a brilliant scholar, and there are no records to show that he won particular distinction beyond sharing a first prize for mathematics with Bourrienne, which goes to prove that the latter profited by the teaching of his chum. Napoleon however, was made commander of a company of cadets which amply atoned, from his own point of view, for all the "ploughing"

he underwent at examinations. The opinion of M. de Keralio, one of the inspectors of the military schools, as to Napoleon's efficiency is as follows:

“School of Brienne: State of the King's scholars eligible from their age to enter into the service or to pass to the school at Paris; to wit, M. de Buonaparte (Napoleon) born the 15th August, 1769, in height 4 feet 10 inches 10 lines, has finished his fourth season; of good constitution, health excellent; character submissive, honest and grateful; conduct very regular; has always distinguished himself by his application to mathematics; understands history and geography tolerably well; is indifferently skilled in merely ornamental studies and in Latin, in which he has only finished his fourth course; would make an excellent sailor; deserves to be passed on to the school at Paris.”

In the light of after events this diagnosis of his character is peculiar; it may be added that he had a deep-rooted affection for those at home in the far-off little island in the Mediterranean. He took upon himself the burden of thinking for the family, and provided them with plenty of gratuitous advice not altogether without wisdom.

A few months before Napoleon placed his foot on the next stepping-stone to fame and fortune he was joined at Brienne by his brother Lucien, who had been at Autun. In a note to one of his uncles Napoleon expresses his satisfaction with the newcomer, “for a beginning,” but pours out a fierce diatribe against Joseph's wish to give up his idea of becoming a priest and entering the

army. In reality there were more difficulties in the way than those mentioned by the writer, and eventually the eldest son was taken home to Corsica by his father. Neither was it destined that Napoleon should become a sailor. Another inspector named Reynaud de Monts visited the school in 1784, and decided that the promising cadet should enter the Military School of Paris, for which institution he left on the 30th October. To the certificate which was forwarded, a brief but sufficiently comprehensive note was added: "Character masterful, impetuous and headstrong." A complete contradiction of M. de Keralio's statement.

No one seeing the dwarfed figure of the lad of fifteen, as he passed through the entrance of the École Militaire, would have cared to prophecy that in a few years the King's scholar would be sitting as Emperor of the French on the throne of his benefactor. Time reveals its own secrets.

CHAPTER III

Napoleon as Officer and Author (1784–1791)

Without waiting to see if he would like the school and the tutors at Paris, or making the hundred and one excuses which usually crowd a schoolboy's brain before definitely settling down to work, Napoleon applied himself to the various subjects necessary to enable him to enter the artillery. This branch of the service held out most possibilities from the point of view of sheer merit, and he chose wisely. At the examination held in September 1785, his name appears as forty-second on the list of candidates, which is neither particularly good nor particularly bad, and would suggest that a certain portion of his time was devoted to studies outside the immediate radius of the official course.

Napoleon had the good fortune to find a friend in Alexandre Desmazis, who shared his room with him and became Administrator of the Crown Buildings during the Consulate. Many other instances might be given of Napoleon's kindness of heart to those who were not so successful in the race of life as was their benefactor. It is a point, and an important one, lost sight of by many of his biographers. There was certainly a better side of the mighty Corsican—he was not all blood and iron.

Apparently the studies of the chums at the École Militaire

were successful, for they were appointed in the succeeding October, to the regiment of La Fere, stationed at Valence, Napoleon as second lieutenant. The two newly-fledged officers had so little money that they were forced to tramp a considerable distance on foot. It was very ignominious and humiliating, but pride is best swallowed quickly and forgotten, like a blue pill. Napoleon was now fatherless, and he felt his responsible position very keenly. Although not the head of the family in reality, he was nominally, for Joseph was far behind his brother in every material respect.

Besides his ordinary military duties Napoleon had to attend lectures on many subjects connected with his profession, including fortifications, chemistry, and mathematics. He seems to have worn off some of the rugged corners of his character. We find him with many friends, including one or two members of the fair sex. Upon one lady in particular, namely Mme. Grégoire de Colombier, he made a most favourable impression, and he received many invitations to her country house at Basseaux. She flattered him, but also tendered much practical advice. Napoleon was too young to fall in love seriously, but he passed many bright hours with Caroline, the daughter of his hostess, and a warm attachment sprang up between them. He ate fruit with her in the garden, and afterwards remarked that those days were some of the happiest in his triumphant but pathetic life. "We were the most innocent creatures imaginable," he says, "we contrived little meetings together; I well remember one which took place on a

midsummer morning, just as daylight was beginning to dawn. It will scarcely be believed that all our happiness consisted in eating cherries together.”

Bonaparte also visited the Permons; and Madame Junot, afterwards Duchess of Abrantès, has left us a witty pen-picture of him as he appeared in full regimentals at the age of sixteen.

“There was one part of his dress,” she writes, “which had a very droll appearance—that was his boots. They were so high and wide that his thin little legs seemed buried in their amplitude. Young people are always ready to observe anything ridiculous, and as soon as my sister and I saw Napoleon enter the drawing-room, we burst into a loud fit of laughter. Buonaparte could not relish a joke; and when he found himself the object of merriment he grew angry. My sister, who was some years older than I, told him that since he wore a sword he ought to be gallant to ladies, and, instead of being angry, should be happy that they joked with him. ‘You are nothing but a child, a little school-girl,’ said Napoleon, in a tone of contempt. Cécile, who was twelve or thirteen years of age, was highly indignant at being called a child, and she hastily resented the affront by replying to Bonaparte, ‘And you are nothing but a Puss in Boots!’ This excited a general laugh among all present except Napoleon, whose rage I will not attempt to describe.” A few days later the young officer went to a bookseller’s shop, purchased a dainty edition of “Puss in Boots,” and presented it to the culprit. This was his way of apologising.

For a time he relaxed his close application to study without

neglecting his books altogether, and turned author. There is a pessimistic strain in all his literary efforts at this period, due no doubt to home-sickness, overwork, and perhaps lack of means, his income certainly never totalling more than twenty shillings a week. He even contemplated suicide, evidence of which is found in a manuscript dated the 3rd May, 1786.

“Always alone in the midst of men,” he complains, “I come back to my rooms to dream with myself, and to surrender myself to all the vivacity of my melancholy. Towards which side is it turned to-day? To the side of death. In the dawn of my days I can still hope to live a long time, but I have been away from my country for about six or seven years. What pleasures shall I not enjoy when in four months’ time I see once more my compatriots and my relations? From the tender sensations with which the recollections of the pleasures of my childhood now fill me, may I not infer that my happiness will be complete? What madness leads me, then, to wish my death? Doubtless the thought: What is there to do in this world?”

This makes strange reading, but it shows that even the greatest men have periods of depression like ordinary folk. He continues in this strain, passes sentence on France for having humiliated his beloved Corsica, and says scarcely less hard things of his own countrymen: “They are no longer those Corsicans, whom a hero inspired with his virtues, enemies of tyrants, of luxury, of demoralized towns.” Towards the end he shows a tinge of enthusiasm; his fighting instinct gets the better of him: “A good

patriot ought to die when his Fatherland has ceased to exist. If the deliverance of my fellow-countrymen depended upon the death of a single man, I would go immediately and plunge the sword which would avenge my country and its violated laws into the breast of tyrants.” He again lapses into melancholy, concluding with a disgust for everything.

The second lieutenant did not take his own life; he lived down his troubles instead. Indeed his favourite motto, and one well worthy of note by every reader of this volume, was “The truest wisdom is a resolute determination.” In August 1786, a rift in the cloud showed the proverbial silver lining, and the chance of a little excitement, which was bread and meat to him, came along. A miniature rebellion had broken out at Lyons, and it was deemed necessary to call out the military. The company at Valence to which Napoleon belonged was marched to the seat of the trouble. Before it arrived the insurrection had blown over, thereby shattering the officer’s hope of distinguishing himself.

From Lyons he proceeded northward to Douay, in Flanders, where he contracted malarial fever which tended to undermine his constitution for several years afterwards. Bad news also reached him from Corsica. His mother appealed to him to come home and give her the benefits of his advice and assistance. Archdeacon Lucien—Napoleon’s great-uncle, who had hitherto acted as head of the family—was daily growing more feeble: the good Letizia feared the worst. Her means were distressingly small, her family inordinately large for the scanty resources at

her disposal. On the 1st of September 1786, he set out for his beloved island. Passing through Aix, he was cheered by a visit to his uncle Fesch and his brother Lucien, both of whom were studying at the Seminary with a view to entering the priesthood. Exactly a fortnight afterwards, Napoleon landed at Ajaccio with a small trunk of clothes and a larger one of books. The works of Plutarch, Plato, Cicero, Nepos, Livy, Tacitus, Montaigne, Montesquieu, Raynal, Corneille, Racine, Voltaire, and the poems of Ossian were all represented.

Napoleon applied himself with his usual industry to straightening out the tangled skein of family troubles. He found it by no means an easy matter, especially as the French Government was involved. The latter had been anxious to introduce the silk industry in their new dependency, and Charles Bonaparte had been one of the first to seize upon the idea because he thought there was "money in it." In 1782 he had made a plantation of young mulberry trees for the purpose of rearing silkworms, but instead of handing over the whole of the money which had been agreed upon in advance, 2700 livres still remained to be paid by the State. On the strength of a certificate of ill-health, Napoleon's leave was extended from the end of March 1787, to the beginning of December, and later until the 1st June 1788. He wandered about the island, visiting his old haunts and companions, but more often finding his greatest consolation in lonely communion with Nature. Sometimes he would turn to his literary pursuits, adding a few paragraphs to a "History of

Corsica,” which was occupying some of his leisure moments. He also composed a short story dealing with English history, entitled “The Count of Essex.” A novel having its setting in Corsica followed, and another attempt at fiction, which he called “The Masked Prophet,” perhaps the best of the three as regards literary style.

On the 12th September 1787, he left Corsica for Paris, in order to clear up the matter of the mulberry trees. He found it impossible to exact money from a bankrupt exchequer, and although he pressed the claim no success attended his efforts. Napoleon accordingly returned to Ajaccio, where he spent part of his spare time drawing up plans for the defence of places round the coast, and postponed his departure until the day he was due to join his regiment at Auxonne. Ever of a calculating nature, the young officer rightly surmised that in those days of lax discipline his absence would not be noticed, or if it were that the insubordination would be passed over.

In the following August (1788) it became evident that the serious work he had put in while his companions were lounging about or frittering away their time was beginning to have its due effect. He became a member of a commission appointed to inquire into the merits or demerits of certain pieces of artillery, and one of the duties—no slight one—which fell to his share was the drawing up of the report. Misfortune, however, had not altogether ceased paying him unwelcome attentions, and, for some reason or other, probably a matter connected with

some work on the fortifications of which he had the oversight, Napoleon was placed under arrest for a day.

His own scheme of education went on apace, as his manuscript note-books, now in the Lorenzo Medici Library at Florence, abundantly testify. One of the works singled out by him for attention was a French translation of Barrow's "History of England, from the Times of Julius Cæsar to the Peace of 1762." His remarks show that he had a special admiration for such men as Hereward the Wake, familiar to all of us in the pages of Kingsley, or in the more recently published historical romance, "The Story of Hereward," by Mr Douglas C. Stedman; Simon de Montfort, whom Napoleon terms "one of the greatest Englishmen"; and the Earl of Arundel, who "died a martyr for the liberty of his country." Cromwell, he says, "was in his early days a libertine. Religion took possession of him, and he became a prophet. Courageous, clever, deceitful, dissimulating, his early principles of republican exaltation yielded to the devouring flame of his ambition, and, after having tasted the sweets of power, he aspired to the pleasure of reigning alone. He had a strong constitution, and had a manly but brusque manner. From the most austere religious functions he passed to the most frivolous amusements, and made himself ridiculous by his buffoonery. He was naturally just and even-tempered." Many of these remarks might be applied not inaptly to Napoleon himself, and if he is not absolutely just to Cromwell, they show that he had a very good understanding of the Protector's general character, and that he

read to learn and not simply to “kill time,” or for amusement.

In April 1789 was heard the distant rumble which heralded the French Revolution, before it broke out in all its hideous extravagancies. Riots had taken place at Seurre, but as in the case of the affair at Lyons, they were quelled before Napoleon or his colleagues put foot in the place. Two months of enforced idleness were spent in the former town before the company was marched back to its headquarters at Auxonne without having had the slightest chance to distinguish itself. When it could have proved useful it broke into open mutiny. This was in July 1789, when a riot took place and the soldiers joined the rebels.

Napoleon had now completed his “History of Corsica,” and on the disgrace of Marbeuf, Bishop of Sens, to whom he had hoped to dedicate it, he decided to ask Paoli to become his patron. He sent him his precious manuscript feeling assured that it would be well received, but the acknowledgment was a rebuff couched in courteous terms. Moreover, the original was mislaid by Paoli, and this unfortunate happening went far to shake the faith of its writer in the great Corsican leader at a later date.

It is now necessary for us to try to understand in some measure the aims and objects of the vast disturbance known to history as the French Revolution. For generations the monarchy and aristocracy of France had refused to listen to the cry of the oppressed people whom they governed. The State was grossly mismanaged; money which should have remained in the pockets of the distressed people was exacted from them and given to

unworthy Court favourites, who spent it in a variety of ways which did not benefit the nation. The nobles and titled clergy paid no taxes, the burden thus fell with undue weight on the middle classes—even now the milch-cow of the State—and the peasants, who toiled day and night for bread. Serious reform was always postponed, although it had been attempted by King Louis XVI. in a feeble and half-hearted way.

A bitter hatred of the persons, institutions, and traditions which contributed to this undesirable state of things was the inevitable consequence; as so often happens, those who desired the righting of wrongs carried their measures too far. “Liberty, equality, and fraternity” were the passwords of the leaders of the new order, but obviously the ideal could not be brought about when nearly everybody held a different theory as to how the abuses were to be rectified. The writings of such philosophers as Montesquieu, Voltaire, and Rousseau, all of which had been diligently perused by Napoleon, had done much to fan the smouldering embers into flames. Soon the whole land was ablaze, massacres became of daily occurrence, the King and Queen paid the price with their heads, the monarchies of Europe were shaken to their very foundations. And what did the people get in exchange for this giant upheaval? The iron despotism of one man, who continued the Revolution in his own person; made the Continent one vast battlefield; drew from France her best manhood and her treasure, and left her territory smaller than when he first put foot on her soil.

At the moment it was impossible for Napoleon to realise the true meaning of the dreadful events which were approaching with such unrestrained rapidity. He foresaw the end of the old state of affairs, and rightly conjectured that they would be swept away never to return; but Corsica was the centre of his interests rather than France. Rent asunder by conflicting ambitions and civil war, his native island might yet tear herself from her hated conquerors. So at least he told himself in his moments of reflection.

In September 1789, Bonaparte again obtained leave of absence until the 1st June 1790. His health was by no means good when he embarked at Marseilles; a mutiny had occurred in his regiment, and altogether his outlook was as gloomy as ever. Freedom from his irksome military duties, however, and the bracing effect of the sea-air rapidly revived his drooping spirits and failing energy.

The echo of the Revolution had been heard in far-off Corsica; there were disturbances, and serious trouble seemed likely, as soldiers were on the move intent upon restoring the sway of the hated royalist authorities. Napoleon called a meeting of patriots, harangued them, and headed a petition to the democratic National Assembly to restore independence to Corsica. He began to organise a National Guard, which was almost immediately dissolved by Vicomte de Barrin, the French Governor. The ardent young man of twenty thereupon set out for Bastia, the official capital of the island, where a passage of arms took place between the soldiers and the people. The latter won the day, and

Barrin was forced to order the arming of the Civic Guard as they wished.

Shortly afterwards news arrived that the National Assembly had decided that Corsica should become a part of the Kingdom of France and enjoy the same constitution. All thought of independence seems to have instantly vanished from Napoleon's mind. He laid down the cudgels without further ado, saying that France "has opened her bosom to us, henceforth we have the same interests and the same solitudes; it is the sea alone which separates us." Joseph being elected a member of the Municipal Council, the Bonaparte family was able to lift up its head again. Further leave of absence on the score of ill-health was again requested by Napoleon and granted. In reality he was taking an active part in affairs, and enjoying it, for Corsica was more or less in a state of anarchy. At Ajaccio he joined a Radical Club called the Patriotic Society, and wrote and printed a "Letter" to Buttafuoco, one of the most hated men in Corsica, who, since the death of Napoleon's father, had represented the nobility of the island at Versailles. It is full of abuse, the writer in his passionate ardour going so far as to say that, having burnt Buttafuoco in effigy, most of the Corsicans would like to burn him in person. Moreover, Paoli was returning, and he foresaw an opportunity of serving him. Paoli received a magnificent reception at Bastia when he arrived on the 17th July. The time for aiding the General of the Corsicans had not yet come, however, and Napoleon again set sail for France, reaching Auxonne, a picturesque little town

on the river Saône, in February 1791.

Several years afterwards, in 1803 to be precise, when he was planning the invasion of our own fair land, Napoleon thus summed up his youthful days to Madame de Rémusat: "I was educated at a military school, and I showed no aptitude for anything but the exact sciences. Every one said of me, 'That child will never be good for anything but geometry.' I kept aloof from my schoolfellows. I had chosen a little corner in the school grounds, where I would sit and dream at my ease; for I have always liked reverie. When my companions tried to usurp possession of this corner, I defended it with all my might. I already knew by instinct that my will was to override that of others, and that what pleased me was to belong to me. I was not liked at school. It takes time to make oneself liked; and, even when I had nothing to do, I always felt vaguely that I had no time to lose.

"I entered the service, and soon grew tired of garrison work. I began to read novels, and they interested me deeply. I even tried to write some. This occupation brought out something of my imagination, which mingled itself with the positive knowledge I had acquired, and I often let myself dream in order that I might afterwards measure my dreams by the compass of my reason. I threw myself into an ideal world, and I endeavoured to find out in what precise points it differed from the actual world in which I lived. I have always liked analysis, and, if I were to be seriously in love, I should analyse my love bit by bit. *Why?* and

How? are questions so useful that they cannot be too often asked. I conquered, rather than studied, history; that is to say, I did not care to retain and did not retain anything that could not give me a new idea; I disdained all that was useless, but took possession of certain results which pleased me.”

It was this skilful combining of the practical and the imaginative which enabled Napoleon to project his vast schemes for the reformation of Europe; it was the elimination of the former and the substitution of an overweening self-confidence which deprived the mighty conqueror of “the throne o’ the world.”

CHAPTER IV

Napoleon and the Corsican Volunteers (1791–1792)

Napoleon again had a companion on his return voyage to France in the person of his brother Louis, a bright little fellow twelve and a half years old. If the latter could not be expected to take any intelligent interest in the many schemes for advancement which were now coursing through Napoleon's super-active brain, he was at least a living link with the family in Ajaccio. The young lieutenant's political ambitions which had received so marked an incentive in Corsica were not allowed to sink to zero, as is so frequently the case when one is away from the whirl and excitement of their practical influence. Rather were they nourished and fed by the sights and scenes Napoleon beheld as the two made their way to Auxonne after they had landed. The fact that he had exceeded his leave of absence worried him not at all, the penalty of six months' imprisonment, should his excuse be deemed invalid, being dismissed from his mind as an unlikely sequel. In his pocket were certificates from the Directory of the district of Ajaccio setting forth in glowing terms the services Napoleon had rendered to Corsica, and stating that his had been an enforced absence from duty owing to the unfavourable weather precluding the vessel from leaving. These credentials

proved sufficient; he did not so much as lose a sou of his pay.

Napoleon quickly returned to his old habits of hard work, and his democratic opinions were voiced with greater vehemence to his fellow-officers, many of whom failed to agree with him and were not afraid to say so. Polite discussions frequently led to less gentlemanly arguments.

The room which the two Bonapartes occupied was almost as poorly furnished as was Chatterton's garret. Facing the window was a table loaded with books, papers, and writing utensils. There was a chair apiece: should a visitor come, either Napoleon or Louis had to sit on the edge of the bed, the younger brother being accommodated at night on a mattress in an adjoining apartment, which was in reality a part of the room and scarcely larger than a cupboard. If at a later period of his career Napoleon showed a desire for lavish display, he certainly was not able to indulge in luxury at Auxonne. He paid for everything required by Louis, clothed him, educated him, and thrashed him when he was disobedient or particularly dense in the matter of lessons. The younger Bonaparte soon became a general favourite, both in and outside the regiment. Napoleon writes with a certain amount of satisfaction that "all the women are in love with him." His faults seem to be summed up in the comprehensive but cynical phrase, "All he needs is knowledge."

In the middle of June 1791, Napoleon bade farewell to Auxonne and set out for Valence, where the Fourth Regiment was in garrison, he having been made first lieutenant of the first

company of the second battalion. His brother accompanied him, lodging elsewhere, as it was not found convenient for Louis to remain in the same house. By way of recreation, frequent visits were paid to Madame de Colombier, but politics more and more absorbed Napoleon. He entered with great zest into the doings of the Society of the Friends of the Constitution, an avowedly revolutionary and republican gathering, and soon became so popular with its members that he was elected secretary and librarian.

The Academy of Lyons having offered a handsome prize, amounting to about £50, for the best essay on "What Truths and what Sentiments is it most Important to impress upon Men for their Happiness?" Napoleon found further scope for his literary gifts. "By sentiment," he assures us in his competitive composition, "we enjoy ourselves, nature, our country, and the men who surround us," and in support of the statement he draws on his own experience. "You return to your country," he writes; "after four years of absence, you visit the spots where you played in your earliest age, where you first experienced the knowledge of men and the awakening of the passions. In a moment you live the life of your childhood, you enjoy its pleasures, you are fired with the love of your country, you have a father and a tender mother, sisters still innocent, brothers who are like friends; too happy man, run, fly, do not lose a moment. If death stop you on your way you will never have known the delights of life, of sweet gratitude, of tender respect, of sincere friendship. These

are the real pleasures of life, and they are greater if you have a wife and children.” He says hard things of immoderate ambition, the very disease which was to prove his own ruin, and calls it “a violent unreflecting madness, which only ceases with life—a conflagration, fanned by a pitiless wind, which does not end till it has consumed everything.” We wonder whether the Emperor, in his hours of introspection on the island of St Helena, when he was proving the truth of the above statement, ever thought of his essay. It did not gain the prize—Napoleon’s name was last but one on the list of competitors.

Yet another leave of absence was requested and granted. It seems little short of extraordinary that, when France was at white heat, holidays should have been granted to soldiers, but such was the case. Napoleon and Louis saw the blue mountains of Corsica and their family in September 1791, a few weeks before the death of Archdeacon Lucien. It almost seemed, from Napoleon’s point of view, as though Fate invariably had an unpleasant surprise for him when he visited Ajaccio, but Letizia always regarded her second son’s homecoming as an act of Providence. Fortunately, his venerable relative left a handsome sum of money to the Bonapartes, a certain amount of which was invested by Napoleon in the purchase of a house in Ajaccio and two properties some little distance away.

It looked for a time as though the tide of fortune was beginning to turn in their favour. Joseph was elected a member of the Directory, the executive committee of the island, and on the

22nd February 1792, Napoleon was appointed Adjutant-Major of the Corsican Volunteers at Ajaccio. Some six weeks later, he was elected second lieutenant-colonel, a position which allowed him to absent himself from his French regiment but made for him an enemy in Pozzo di Borgo, a man who afterwards rose to distinction at the Russian Court, and had much to do with his successful rival's fall in after years.

Napoleon's opportunity for action soon came. Revolutionary principles regarded religion as of little consequence, and it was decided that the convents in the four most important towns of Corsica should be suppressed. This was not to be achieved without difficulty, and as strife and possibly bloodshed were thought highly probable, it was decided that a number of volunteers should be on hand at Ajaccio. On Easter Day 1792, a disturbance occurred in one of the streets. A dozen volunteers marched out to end it, only to make the disorder more general. Napoleon felt it his duty to interfere, but was obliged to take refuge after one of the men had been killed. The action of the volunteers was, of course, illegal, as they had acted on their own responsibility. Napoleon defended them, and in company with Quenza, his senior in command, endeavoured to persuade Colonel Maillard, the commander of the fortress, to deliver it into their hands. The Colonel, however, would have nothing to do with them beyond giving food for their men.

Early the following morning another band of volunteers entered the Seminary, fired indiscriminately, and angered the

inhabitants. Disorder increased to such an extent as the day began to wane that it became necessary to proclaim martial law—in other words, the regular military were given absolute control until order should be restored. Various outrages on the part of the volunteers, of which Napoleon was by no means innocent, followed during the night. He endeavoured to corrupt the regular soldiers without success, and thus began that scheme of lying and plotting which he was to pursue even after he had been elected Emperor of the French. He was absolutely unscrupulous when, as always, he had his own ends to serve. In the case under consideration, he undertook that his men should be kept under restraint, the authorities promising that they would see that the people did not interfere with the volunteers. Napoleon's intention may have been good, but his men certainly continued to behave in a most disgraceful manner. Eventually order was restored, and a rebuke administered to Napoleon by his battalion being ordered to retire to Corte.

The part he had played did not increase his popularity, and he thought it well to return to the French capital a month after war had been declared against Austria. As he himself said, "The beginning of a revolution was a fine time for an enterprising young man!"

CHAPTER V

The Eve of the Reign of Terror (1792–1793)

Paris was in a ferment. The King had to be guarded by a double cordon of soldiers, so bitter was the animosity against the Royal Family and all that it stood for. With his usual shrewdness and faculty for penetrating into the probabilities of the future, Napoleon correctly anticipated events, and wrote to his brother Joseph that “everything tends to a revolution.” On the 20th June 1792, a wild procession of insurrectionists, accompanied by cannon, made its way to the Tuileries, and intimidated the Guard. The latter opened the gates of the courtyard and the motley mob crowded into the beautiful palace, openly insulting King Louis and Queen Marie Antoinette. A republican Assembly had been forced upon the monarch, who was duly reaping the first-fruits of the harvest. Bourrienne gives a graphic account of what happened and how it affected the ardent politician of twenty-three. Napoleon’s remarks clearly show that he had no belief in the aspirations of the rebels, notwithstanding his own ardent republicanism. Throughout his life he always held the *canaille* in profound contempt.

“We met,” Bourrienne tells us, “by appointment, at a *restaurateur’s* in the Rue St Honoré, near the Palais Royal. On

going out we saw a mob approaching in the direction of the market-place, which Bonaparte estimated at from five to six thousand men. They were a parcel of blackguards, armed with weapons of every description, and shouting the grossest abuse, whilst they proceeded at a rapid rate towards the Tuileries. This mob appeared to consist of the vilest and most profligate of the population of the suburbs. 'Let us follow the rabble,' said Bonaparte. We got the start of them, and took up our station on the terrace bordering the river. It was there that he was an eye-witness of the scandalous scenes that ensued; and it would be difficult to describe the surprise and indignation which they excited in him. 'Such weakness and forbearance,' he said, 'could not be excused'; but when the King showed himself at a window which looked out upon the garden, with the red cap, which one of the mob had just placed upon his head, he could no longer repress his indignation: 'What madness!' he loudly exclaimed, 'how could they allow that rabble to enter? Why do they not sweep away four or five hundred of them with the cannon? and then the rest would take themselves off very quickly.' When we sat down to dinner, he discussed with great good sense the causes and consequences of this unrepressed insurrection. He foresaw, and developed with sagacity, all that would follow; and in this he was not mistaken."

In a letter to Joseph written on the 3rd July, Napoleon again reveals himself as a philosopher. "Every one seeks his own interest," he says, "and wishes to rise by means of lying and calumny; men intrigue more contemptibly than ever. All that

destroys ambition. One pities those who have the misfortune to play a part, especially when they can do without it. To live quietly, to enjoy the love of one's family surroundings—that, my dear fellow, if one had 4000 or 5000 francs a year, would be the wise thing to do. One should also be between the ages of twenty-five and forty, when one's imagination has calmed down, and is no longer troublesome. I embrace you, and recommend to you moderation in everything—in everything, do you understand?—if you wish to live happily.”

A week later Napoleon received a welcome letter from the Minister of War appointing him Captain of the 4th regiment of artillery, and his arrears of pay were also sent. Life seemed to be worth living once more. Promotion is a fine antidote against depression.

It soon became evident that nothing short of civil warfare would satisfy the rioters, and on the 10th August 1792, the long pent-up storm burst with awful fury. The King, Queen, and other members of the royal family made their way to the Assembly, or Parliament, where they sat in a reporter's box listening to a debate as to whether Louis should be deposed or suspended, and which ended in a unanimous vote for the latter course. Meanwhile the mob was quickly gathering, a dozen pieces of artillery were drawn up, and the insurgents assumed a threatening attitude. Many of the Swiss and National Guards, whose duty it was to defend the Tuileries, found it necessary in the face of such overwhelming numbers to withdraw into

the palace. Firing commenced, and for a time the royalists triumphed. Probably the crowd would have thinned away had not a foolish message arrived from Louis to the effect that the Swiss were to withdraw to their barracks. While this was being done the rioters rushed into the palace and in their mad frenzy slaughtered indiscriminately nearly every male attendant to be found, shooting wildly at the body-guard as they retreated. Another order came from the King that the Swiss were to lay down their arms. This the brave fellows did, although they knew what might happen. Those who were not killed by the mob were taken prisoners and put in the Church of the *Feuillants*, and on the following day many of them were mercilessly massacred. Those of my readers who have been to Lucerne have doubtless seen the noble monument in bas-relief of a dying lion erected to the memory of the brave Swiss. Napoleon himself saved one of the body-guard, and asserted that "If Louis XVI. had mounted his horse, the victory would have been his—so I judge from the spirit which prevailed in the morning." He always believed in a bold front; the King's action was an unmistakable sign of weakness.

Years after at St Helena Napoleon related the events of the fatal day as he watched them from a furniture shop belonging to Bourrienne's brother, Fauvelet. "Before I arrived at the Carrousel," he says, "I had been met in the Rue des Petits Champs by a group of hideous men carrying a head on the end of a pike. Seeing me well dressed, and looking like a gentleman, they came to me to make me cry, '*Vive la Nation!*' which I did

without difficulty, as you may believe. The *château* was attacked by the violent mob. The King had for his defence at least as many troops as the Convention had on Vendémiaire 13th, when they had to fight against a better-disciplined and more formidable enemy.¹ The greater part of the National Guard was on the side of the King—one must do them this justice. When the palace had been fired, and the King had taken refuge in the bosom of the Assembly, I ventured to penetrate into the garden. Never since have any of my battle-fields given me such an idea of death as the mass of the Swiss corpses then presented to me, whether the smallness of the space made the number appear larger, or whether it was because I was to undergo this experience for the first time.... I visited all the *cafés* in the neighbourhood of the Assembly; everywhere the irritation was extreme, rage was in every heart, it showed itself in all faces, although the people present were not by any means of the lower class, and all these places must have been daily frequented by the same customers, for although I had nothing peculiar in my dress—but perhaps my countenance was more calm—it was easy to see that I excited many looks of hostility and defiance as being unknown and a suspect.”

August 1792 was indeed a month of events fraught with far-reaching consequences. The decree went forth that all religious houses should be confiscated and sold. Along with the death-knell of royalty was sounded that of religion. Élise, the most

¹ 5th October, 1795.—See *post*, chapter vii. p. 71.

determined and resolute of Napoleon's three sisters, was then at the College of St Cyr, and he felt it would not be safe for her to stay in France a single moment longer than was absolutely necessary. He still put family ties before patriotism; in reality each is part and parcel of the other. His position was difficult, for it would have been foolish to have jeopardised his captaincy, but he thought he saw a way out, and applied for a commission which would insure his going to Corsica, which was not granted. A petition to the Directory of the district of Versailles, requesting that he be allowed to accompany Élise, met with a more favourable response. On the 1st September, the day before the revolutionary Commune of Paris began the massacre of hundreds of citizens because they did not happen to sympathise fully with the Revolution, Napoleon conducted his sister from St Cyr. In October they were in their native town once more, Napoleon resuming his duties as second lieutenant-colonel of the volunteers.

The island of Sardinia, which is separated from Corsica by the Strait of Bonifacio and now belongs to Italy, had cherished dreams of declaring her independence. It was therefore determined that Admiral Truguet and a number of troops and volunteers should sail from Marseilles, call at Ajaccio for additional men, and under the command of Raffaele Casabianca, endeavour to assist the rebellious islanders. Almost as soon as they had landed in Corsica there was trouble between the sailors and the unruly volunteers, three of the

latter being hanged in consequence. Paoli, now President of the Administration and Commander-in-Chief of the National Guards, felt that this was indeed a sorry prelude to an expedition in which loyal co-operation was an absolute essential. The aged patriot therefore wisely decided that only regular troops should be sent. Cagliari, the capital of the island, was deemed the most important point of attack; San Stefano was to be occupied by a second division under the command of Colonel Cesari-Colonna, Paoli's nephew, and accompanied by Napoleon. The attempt on the first place failed miserably owing to a want of confidence on the part of the besiegers, and the troops at San Stefano accomplished little. They certainly effected a landing, and on the night of the 23rd February, 1793, Napoleon and his men hastily erected a battery, from which point of vantage they proceeded to bombard Maddalena. On the following evening, however, the troops showed that they had no more heart for warfare than their compatriots at Cagliari, and a retreat became absolutely necessary. For this Napoleon is in no way to be blamed. There is more than a suspicion of treachery, and it has been suggested that either Paoli or some of his followers had arranged that the expedition should fail in order to humble the too enterprising and over-confident Bonaparte, who was nearly left behind in a disgraceful struggle to get into the boats.

Napoleon's dream of a free Corsica had long since passed away; he was convinced that without France she might fall a prey to any Power or bold maritime adventurer who cared to risk

the attempt upon her. Relations between him and Paoli became more and more strained. Probably he felt in his own mind that the dictator's cause was hopeless, and consequently offered no advantages. France on the other hand, appeared likely to become all-powerful. She seemingly stopped at nothing, and was as bent on "setting Europe to rights" in her fashion as was Pitt in his. But what was of more immediate importance was the startling and unexpected intelligence that the Convention had ordered Paoli's arrest, as well as that of Pozzo, his right-hand man. The author of this ill-service was none other than Lucien Bonaparte, who had acted as Paoli's secretary for several months and was now in France occupying his leisure moments in securing the downfall of the patriot by denouncing him to the authorities at Toulon. This conduct can only be described as infamous, and goes to prove that a keen sense of morality was not a conspicuous trait of the Bonaparte family. Lucien had not taken his brother into his confidence, and no one was more astonished than Napoleon when the truth of the matter was revealed to him. The net result was to embroil more deeply the island in a civil war which had been carried on in a desultory kind of way for some time, breaking out into flame here and there, and dying down almost as speedily.

We now catch a glimpse of Napoleon as a diplomatist. He sent a communication to the Convention glowing with fulsome flattery and pleading that "the patriarch of liberty, and the precursor of the French Republic," might be spared this last

ignominy. The young officer was playing a double part. With Salicetti he planned to secure the citadel of Ajaccio by artifice, but without success. He then decided to tramp to Bastia, where the French Commissioners were investigating the condition of affairs and making preparations for resistance against the islanders. Here he hoped to meet Joseph, who had also attached himself to the French cause. One cannot but admire the dogged determination which prompted such a proceeding. His precept that "It is only by perseverance and tenaciousness that any object can be obtained," was not a mere moral maxim, a passing thought to be dismissed as casually as it had entered the brain.

Napoleon's journey across the island was quite an adventurous one. Accompanied only by a poor but sagacious shepherd he traversed rugged ravines and valleys, every recess of which was dangerous and might shelter a band of Paolists. In passing through the village of Bocognano he fell into the hands of the enemy and was locked up in what was considered a safe place. But under cover of night, and by the aid of friends, he effected his escape through a window, and the whole of the following day he was forced to conceal himself in a garden. From this unhappy and insecure hiding-place he made his way to the house of a cousin, but on the evening of his third day there a Nationalist brigadier entered and demanded to search the place. Good fortune again attended the fugitive. The unwelcome visitor was cajoled into a belief that Napoleon, against whom an order for arrest had now been issued, had neither been seen nor heard of in that quarter,

and he did not persist in his demand. Shortly after he had left the house he was followed by the refugee, who had been sitting in another room with the servants, all of whom were sufficiently well armed to offer a desperate resistance if necessary.

A ship was riding at anchor awaiting him, and, stealthily finding his way to the dinghy on the beach, Napoleon was quickly on board. It was a case of touch and go, for the Nationalists would not have allowed him to escape from their hands a second time.

Eventually he reached Bastia, and made such a good impression on the Commissioners that a naval expedition against Ajaccio was fitted out and he was given command of the artillery. A week later the little band of some four hundred men sighted the harbour. The attempt to make the patriotic citizens surrender was a complete fiasco, for while Lacombe Saint Michel, Salicetti, Napoleon, and Joseph were joined by a few dozen soldiers and citizens, Paoli was being reinforced by people from all over the island. The men were disembarked, captured a fortress known as the Torre di Capitello, which they soon evacuated, and returned. Another failure had been added to Napoleon's record. The Bonaparte family paid dearly for the part they played at this time. Their enemies, and they were many, wrecked Madame Letizia's house. Fortunately her resourceful son had foreseen such an event, and not only warned his mother but arranged for her escape. She and her children were thus enabled to leave the place before the angry Paolists set about their work of destruction, and after a long tramp were taken to Calvi by sea. Eight days

after their arrival a small merchant vessel was chartered for a voyage to Toulon, and late on the night of the 11th June 1793, the dispossessed family, including Napoleon, sailed in the direction of France and of Fortune.

CHAPTER VI

Napoleon's First Fight with the English (1793)

The first six months of the year 1793 were notable ones in France. No more fortunate than many others who did not wear the imperial purple, the King paid for his incompetency with his head. Louis XVI. was one of those weak persons who mean well but carry their good intentions to no practical issue. His execution on the 21st January brought more important and far-reaching results than his thirty-eight years of life. Republican France, proclaimed on the 22nd September 1792, was no longer a mere dream of enthusiasts, but a reality, although the foundations were insecure and the superstructure top-heavy. The seed of liberty had been planted, and it was fondly hoped that it would bring forth an increase which would blossom in every country.

In the previous April the luckless Louis had been reluctantly compelled to declare war on Austria, the latter Power receiving the support of Prussia. The attempt on the part of the half-disciplined French troops under General Dumouriez to invade the Austrian Netherlands signally failed. This poor beginning was amply retrieved at Valmy and by the seizure of the Netherlands

after the battle of Jemappes on the 6th of the following November. Savoy and the Rhine Valley were also occupied, and promises of assistance made to all countries that cared to raise the standard of revolt.

With the execution of Louis XVI. monarchical Europe assumed a more threatening aspect. The Convention had already stated that its business was to drive out “tyrants” who occupied thrones, and such a proclamation was not pleasant reading for those whom it most concerned. Owing to an “attachment to the coalition of crowned heads” on the part of George III., France declared war against England on the 1st February 1793, and as the latter had allied herself to Holland, that country also received the same unwelcome challenge. The two Powers shortly afterwards joined hands with Russia, Spain and the Holy Roman Empire for the purpose of mutual support. France had more than her hands full, especially as she was in an unsettled state within her own borders. The momentary triumphs of the Revolutionary troops did not last. The Convention supported the war in the Netherlands half-heartedly, and so enraged Dumouriez that he deserted to Austria and subsequently retired to England, where he spent his remaining days. Government passed into the hands of a select few known as the Committee of Public Safety. In the Convention were two parties, the Girondists or moderate republicans, and the Mountain, whose views were considerably more advanced and far less reasonable. They could not rule themselves much less the nation. The

Mountain prevailed, and the cause of the Girondists was taken up with enthusiasm by the people of La Vendée, a department of Brittany, which had no sympathy with the extreme measures advocated by the Mountain. In company with several other populous centres Marseilles revolted, and it was to this city that the Bonapartes proceeded in September, 1793, after having led a dreary existence on the outskirts of Toulon. By this time affairs had quieted down again. Napoleon's sympathy was with the policy of the Mountain. Having been promoted to the position of *capitaine commandant* he had joined his regiment at Nice in the previous June. He sent his family every sou he could spare from his meagre pay, but this did not suffice to keep its members from actual want, and the proud Letizia and her children were obliged to eat the bread of charity. Gradually things took on a rosier complexion, and Joseph, Lucien, and Joseph Fesch, who was of the party, obtained positions which presumably left a small margin for the benefit of their sorely-stricken relations. It seemed as though Dame Fortune were indeed smiling when small pensions from a fund which had been voted for Corsican refugees were granted to the mother and each child under the age of fifteen.

Being unable to get an appointment on active service, for which he ardently longed, Napoleon sought solace in literature. Had he failed in the army it is not at all improbable that he would have become a literary man; although it is doubtful if his achievements in this field would have made his name famous.

For the moment he sheathed his sword and took up his pen, producing a pamphlet written in the form of a dialogue, entitled "The Supper at Beaucaire." To quote the opinion of Sir John Seeley: "It is highly characteristic, full of keen and sarcastic sagacity, and of clear military views; but the temperature of its author's mind has evidently fallen suddenly; it has no warmth, but a remarkable cynical coldness." It was published at Avignon in August 1793. Like his previous publications it attracted little or no attention in the days when printing presses were turning out pamphlets by the thousand, but as if to counterbalance the failure, Napoleon was about to have an opportunity to show his talents along the line they were slowly but surely developing.

The inhabitants of the great southern seaport and arsenal of Toulon, the majority of them royalists to the core, had openly rebelled. Unlike those of Marseilles, who had raised an army against the Convention, they had gone so far as to call in the assistance of the enemy. English and Spanish fleets under Hood and Langara respectively, blockaded the harbour; in other words prevented or attempted to prevent the entry and exit of vessels; and troops which had been hastily landed were in command of the town. It soon became evident that the Convention would have to re-take the place by force.

The commander of the artillery having been wounded, Napoleon, now *chef de bataillon*, was called upon to take his place. The army which he joined consisted of a motley crowd hastily gathered together. Trained officers were in the minority,

for the simple reason that until the fall of Louis XVI. none but the nobility had been allowed to hold a command. Their plebeian successors endeavoured to make up for a lack of military education by a zeal which was not infrequently manifested in the wrong place and at the wrong moment. For instance, Carteaux, originally an artist, having been invested with the command of the army marching on Toulon and failing miserably, his place was taken by Doppet, a retired doctor who succeeded no better. Not until the amateurs had been tried and found wanting was the position given to Dugommier, a veteran who had served with the colours for half a century, and who was to meet his death by a Spanish bullet in the following year.

Modern authorities regard with suspicion the oft-repeated assertion that Napoleon persuaded the Council of War to adopt the plan he had drawn up for the purpose of capturing the well-nigh impregnable town. There is no doubt that he behaved with consummate bravery throughout the siege. He seemed to know instinctively what to do in a case of emergency. Examples could be multiplied, but one must suffice. A soldier who was serving a big gun was struck lifeless while Napoleon was standing near. Without hesitation he took the dead man's place and proceeded to ram home the ammunition until another artilleryman stepped forward. He did not expect others to do what he feared to undertake himself, and he was never backward in appreciating bravery and resource in others.

One day he was directing the construction of a battery when

it became necessary for him to dictate a despatch. He called for some one to write it for him, and a young man named Junot offered to do so. A heavy shot came to earth within such a short distance of them that Junot was literally covered with dust. "Good," he exclaimed, "we shall not want sand this time," referring, of course, to the old method of blotting wet ink. Napoleon never forgot the incident, and Junot received his reward when Napoleon came into his own. Victor Perrin also came under the notice of Napoleon at the siege of Toulon. He was twice wounded, but stuck to his guns, which he fired with much skill.

Having ordered a battery to be erected in an exposed position in the near vicinity of Fort Mulgrave, one of the most important of the English strongholds, Napoleon named this "the battery of the fearless." His keen sense of the dramatic told him that henceforth it would be deemed an honour to be there, either dead or alive. Doppet says that "whenever he visited the outposts of the army, he was always sure to find the Commandant of Artillery at his post; he slept little, and that little he took on the ground, wrapped in his mantle: he hardly ever quitted his batteries." Napoleon developed extraordinary initiative. He sent for the guns not in use by the Army of Italy, procured horses by requisition, established a repair shop, ordered five thousand sand-bags to be made every day at Marseilles to be used for purposes of defence, and had a small army of smiths, wheelwrights, and carpenters at his command. "Nothing was done but by Bonaparte's orders or

under his influence; everything was submitted to him,” Marmont assures us. “He made tables of what was required; indicated how this was to be obtained; put everything in motion, and, in a week, gained an ascendancy over the Commissioners almost impossible to be concealed.”

Fort Mulgrave, called by its besiegers “the little Gibraltar,” was the key of the position, for it commanded the inner harbour. Before dawn on the morning of the 17th December, three columns of soldiers set out to reduce it, a previous attack having failed largely owing to the premature sounding of the retreat. Twice the attacking party was all but successful, and as a last resource the reserves under Napoleon were called up. Although his battalion was not the first to scale the walls, young Bonaparte and his men did magnificent work, and soon the guns which had been trained on the French were firing in the direction of the enemy. On the same day the Tricolour waved over two more forts which had been evacuated, the enemy finding Toulon untenable and resistance impossible in the face of the 37,000 men who were confronting them; the English, Spanish, Piedmontese and Neapolitan forces not numbering more than 17,200. Napoleon began to bombard the now doomed city and the fleet which still lay in the roadstead. That night Sidney Smith, a gallant young English captain, with a little body of men equally brave, set fire to a dozen French ships in the harbour. The naval stores were soon well alight, the flames spreading with bewildering rapidity, and the Spaniards exploded two powder-ships. On the 19th, Lord

Hood in the *Victory* weighed anchor, and the British fleet left the scene of disaster with over 14,000 of the terror-stricken inhabitants on board, and four ships-of-the-line, three frigates and several smaller vessels as spoil.

The luckless Toulonese paid heavily for their defection. For hours the city was given up to pillage, the Republican troops losing all restraint and refusing to listen to the humane pleadings of Dugommier. Nor was this all, for about 1800 persons perished by the guillotine or were shot. The Reign of Terror was not confined to Paris.

“Who is that little bit of an officer, and where did you pick him up?” some one is reported to have asked Dugommier. “That officer’s name,” was the reply, “is Napoleon Bonaparte. I picked him up at the Siege of Toulon, to the successful termination of which he eminently contributed, and you will probably one day see that this little bit of an officer is a greater man than any of us.”

It is certain that Dugommier was highly pleased with the conduct of his able lieutenant, indeed he “mentioned him in despatches,” an honour for which every soldier longs. “Among those who distinguished themselves most,” he writes, “and who most aided me to rally the troops and push them forward, are citizens Buona Parte, commanding the artillery, Arena and Cervoni, Adjutants-General.” Generals Du Teil and Salicetti also said kind things of the Corsican. “Words fail me to describe Bonaparte’s merit”; says the former, “to a mind well stored with science, he brings great intelligence and unlimited courage. Such

is a weak sketch of the qualities of this incomparable officer.”

For the services thus rendered Napoleon received another step in rank, and on the 1st February 1794, he became General of Brigade. His duties were to inspect the defences of the southern coast and to supervise the artillery and stores of the Army of Italy, commanded by General Schérer, whose headquarters were at Nice. Napoleon arrived at that town in the following March, and a month later was appointed General in Command of the Artillery.

CHAPTER VII

Napoleon the Soldier of Fortune

(1794–1796)

France resounded with the tramp of armed men. No fewer than five armies, largely made up of volunteers and probably numbering nearly 700,000, in addition to those on garrison duty, were facing the enemies of the Republic. There was the Army of the North, of the Moselle, of the Rhine, of the West, and of Italy. It is interesting to note that many of those who held important positions in these forces were men who, like Carteaux and Doppet, had followed other trades or professions previous to the Revolution. By adapting themselves to circumstances, exercising ingenuity when their slight knowledge of tactics failed them, and proving their ability in the field, they had risen to positions of power and influence. Jourdan, with the Army of the North, had been a dealer in cloth; with the Army of the Moselle were Hoche and Moreau, the former the son of an ostler, the latter once a lawyer in beautiful Brittany; Kléber, of the Army of the West, had been educated as an architect, while Masséna, who was with the Army of Italy, had started life as a sailor. The promise of the Revolution to every son of France, "A career open to talent," was not a mere boast, but was realised in many cases. Napoleon himself studied to make his soldiers feel that no rank

was beyond their aspiration. There was a marshal's baton in every knapsack.

Although Napoleon received an appointment in the Army of Italy in the dual capacity of General of Artillery and Inspector-General, the opportunity of showing his now recognised abilities as an executant was denied him in this campaign. The chance came from another and an unexpected direction, namely that of diplomacy. It cannot be said that his diplomatic attempts in Corsica had been particularly brilliant; this, however, did not preclude Augustin Robespierre, a Commissioner of the Convention with whom Napoleon had struck up an intimate acquaintance, from placing a difficult problem requiring the greatest political skill and tact in his hands for solution. Genoa, once a great Sea Power, but now in the evening of her decline and decay, was supposed to be neutral, in other words, taking sides with none of the warring nations. But she had allowed enemies of France to pass through her territory, and by so doing had incurred the wrath of the mighty Republic, notwithstanding her excuse that she was not powerful enough to prevent them.

To Genoa, the city of palatial buildings and gorgeous churches, Napoleon accordingly proceeded in July 1794, and so well did he manage his cause that his mission was completely successful. On the 28th of the same month he returned to the headquarters of the Army of Italy in the full expectation of an ample recognition. His hopes were shattered by the astounding news that his friend and patron had been executed in company

with his brother Maximilien Robespierre, the cruel chief of the Jacobins.

During the reign of the "Incorruptible," as the latter was named by his friends and supporters, the streets of Paris ran with blood. By his orders, and those of his satellites, scores of prisoners were dragged daily from gaol and put to death. The flower of the Nobility of France suffered in company with the lowest of the low, for the guillotine was no respecter of persons.

Napoleon found that his diplomatic triumph did not avail to prevent his arrest on account of what was held to be his suspicious conduct in connection with the Army of Italy, his recent mission to Genoa, and his intimacy with the younger Robespierre, whose admiration had gone so far as to prompt a reference to Napoleon in a despatch to Government as "a man of transcendent merit." For a time his destiny hung in the balance. Had Salicetti, Albitte and Laporte, the Commissioners of the Convention who examined his papers, cared to condemn him, the General in all probability would have met the same terrible fate as his friend. There is more than a suspicion that Salicetti now viewed Napoleon with jealousy, but, according to Marmont, he used his influence to procure his release. It is difficult to arrive at the truth in a matter such as this, when contemporary narrators do not agree. In history one must not take too much for granted, and perhaps it may be a reasonable conclusion to assume that Salicetti was not ignorant of the potential powers of his countryman, and that he recognised that no good could be

done by condemning such a man, while much advantage might accrue to himself if he supported him.

Meanwhile the enterprising General was deprived of his rank. Instead of bemoaning his fate, Napoleon penned an energetic letter to his judges in which he defended his case on the grounds of his patriotism, his hatred of all tyrants, and his public services. On the 20th August a counter-order was issued in which mention was made of the “advantages which might be derived from his military information and knowledge of localities, for the service of the Republic,” and recommending that Citizen Bonaparte be “restored provisionally to liberty, and that he should remain at headquarters pending further instructions from the Committee of Public Safety.”

Napoleon spent fourteen days in suspense at Fort Carré, near Antibes, but he was mercifully allowed a supply of books and maps which helped to pass the time. On the last day of his imprisonment an officer came at two o'clock in the morning to announce the pleasing intelligence that his release was ordered.

“What! Are you not in bed yet?” he cried in astonishment as he entered the cell and saw Napoleon poring over the litter of papers on the little table.

“In bed!” was the contemptuous retort. “I have had my sleep, and am already risen.”

“What, so early?” the officer replied, amazed beyond measure at so unusual a statement.

“Yes,” continued the prisoner, “so early. Two or three hours

of sleep are enough for any man.”

To use a familiar and expressive simile, Napoleon had now “jumped from the frying-pan into the fire.” Although he was restored to his former rank he was not sent back to the army, but remained for a time unemployed, living with his family at Marseilles. While there he fell in love with Mademoiselle Désirée Clary, the daughter of a wealthy soap merchant, whose sister Julie had married Joseph Bonaparte. The enraptured lover went so far as to arrange for the wedding to take place in the following autumn. “Perhaps I am doomed to shine like a meteor,” he told the object of his affection, “but I will ensure you a brilliant existence.” Love’s young dream was soon shattered by the disturbing spirit of ambition, and vowing eternal faithfulness Napoleon left his sorrowful sweetheart and promptly forgot his pledge. An expedition against Corsica, which had passed into the hands of the British, had been decided upon. In company with his brother Louis, now a sub-lieutenant of artillery, he set sail on the 3rd March 1795, and came near to being captured, two of the ships carrying the soldiers falling prey to the “ravening wolves of the sea,” as Napoleon called English sailors. The defeat sustained on this occasion added one more to his long list of disasters in connection with Corsican affairs.

At the beginning of May he went to Paris to anticipate or await future events. He now resumed his friendship with Bourrienne, who had been in Germany. Offered an appointment as Brigadier-General of Infantry in the Army of the West, then engaged in

putting down the civil war in La Vendée, he refused it on his usual plea of ill-health. In reality he considered it beneath his dignity to accept the command. The Central Committee retaliated by having his name struck off the active list.

This displeasure was not to be of considerable duration. Napoleon turned his attention to the drawing up of a definite scheme of campaign for the Army of Italy, now meeting with rebuffs at the hands of the Austrians. The documents were sent to the Committee of Public Safety in July, and helped him to secure a staff appointment in the topographical department of the War Office, where he worked at plans and operations for the benefit of the various French armies in the field. Incidentally he made the acquaintance of various people likely to be of use to him in the furtherance of his career, and renewing that with Barras whom he had first met at Toulon.

Meantime Paris, well named the Gay City, had assumed something of its former aspect. There was marriage and giving in marriage, the theatres and other places of amusement opened anew, and the infallible barometer of business began to rise. Almost everywhere the half-trained armies had been victorious. Apparently "better times" had begun. The change in the political weather, although clearer, was not so noticeable. To be sure a constitution had been framed by the National Convention and was given to the world on the 22nd September 1795, but it did not give the universal satisfaction hoped for by the more enthusiastic of its supporters. In certain minor respects the Legislative Body

upon which they had decided was not unlike our own Parliament, in so far as it consisted of two Houses, the lower chamber being called the Council of Five Hundred and the upper chamber the Council of Ancients. The former drew up the laws, the latter passed, adjusted, or rejected them. From the two Councils a Directory of five men vested with the executive power was to be chosen, one of whom was to retire for re-election every year.

Having decreed that one-third of the members of both Councils should also retire in the same way, either to be re-elected or to surrender their places to others, the Convention stirred up a hornet's nest for itself by deciding that two-thirds of its members should be retained in the new Legislature, whereas it had originally assembled for the purpose of drawing up a constitution and not to govern. Girondists and supporters of the Mountain alike clung tenaciously to office, anxious to retain the spoils of victory. The members of the Convention soon found that public opinion was against them. "This measure," says Baron de Frénilly, "aroused general indignation, for nobody, apart from its accomplices, wished that it should possess either power or impunity."

Paris was again in a ferment as serious as it was unexpected. The old battle cry of "Down with the aristocrats!" gave place to that of "Down with the two-thirds!" A rival government called the Central Committee was set up and almost as speedily suppressed by the regular troops, acting on the authority of the Convention. They met with more difficulty in attempting to

disperse the insurgent electors of Paris, who had 30,000 National Guards on their side. General Menou, the commander of the troops, was taken prisoner, only to be put under arrest on his release by the party whom he had attempted to defend. The command was then given to Paul Barras, who among others chose Napoleon as a lieutenant. He could not have selected a better man, as subsequent events proved. Barras ordered cannon from the Sablons camp, and the trained eye of his colleague enabled him to place them in the best possible positions to command the various thoroughfares and bridges which led to the Tuileries, the building against which the National Guard and the citizens were marching. Napoleon had certainly not more than 7,000 armed men at his disposal, but his troops were victorious on the ever-memorable 13th Vendémiaire (5th October 1795), and the "whiff of grape shot," as he termed it, helped materially to pave the way to the throne. For the present his skill was rewarded by the rank of second in command of the Army of the Interior, and later, when his friend Barras vacated the senior position, Napoleon received the appointment.

The National Convention could afford to be generous to the beardless young General who had saved the situation. It forthwith settled down to elect five Directors, namely, La Réveillière-Lépeaux, Letourneur, Rewbell, Carnot, and Barras.

Napoleon now began to take an interest in Society. He frequented the *Salons* where wit and beauty gathered for mutual admiration and intellectual entertainment. It is doubtful whether

he cared for either to any considerable extent. Certainly he had no mock modesty, and realising more than ever the value of being on speaking terms with those likely to be of service to him, he regarded the precious hours thus apparently wasted as a future asset. He preferred the *Salon* of Barras to any other. This led to his introduction to his future first wife, the fascinating Josephine de Beauharnais, whose courtier husband had suffered the same fate as Robespierre during the Reign of Terror. Addison, the famous essayist, tells us that “a marriage of love is pleasant; a marriage of interest—easy; and a marriage where both meet—happy.” Napoleon’s matrimonial venture may be regarded as a judicious combination of the two, and to a certain extent it was happy. The marriage, which was not blessed by the Church, it being a Civil contract, took place on the 9th March 1796. The bridegroom was twenty-six years of age, his bride thirty-four.

Ten days before Napoleon had been given command of the Army of Italy at the instigation of Carnot. Barras, in his *Mémoires*, insinuates that his influence led the Directory to this decision. In reality the General had largely won his own case. His pen had not lost its cunning, and further plans which he had brought forward for a decisive campaign by the now moribund Army of Italy had attracted considerable attention, although when sent to Schérer, who had succeeded Kellermann in the command, they met with a rebuff at the hands of that worthy. As a direct consequence he was superseded by the soldier who had dared to interfere.

During his exile, when the glamour of his second marriage with the daughter of the Cæsars had passed and the memory of better times was the bitter-sweet consolation of his turbulent mind, Napoleon frequently reflected on his affection for the vivacious woman who shared his first triumphs and his throne. "Josephine was devoted to me," he tells Montholon, one of the little band of faithful followers who refused to desert him in the hour of failure. "She loved me tenderly; no one ever had a preference over me in her heart. I occupied the first place in it; her children the next; and she was right in thus loving me; for she is the being whom I have most loved, and the remembrance of her is still all-powerful in my mind."

CHAPTER VIII

“The Spark of Great Ambition”

(1796)

“Soldiers! you are ill-fed and almost naked; the Government owes you much, but can do nothing for you. Your patience, your courage, do you honour, but bring you neither advantage nor glory. I am about to lead you into the most fertile plains of the world. Rich provinces, great cities will be in your power. There you will find honour, and fame, and wealth. Soldiers of the Army of Italy, will you be found wanting in courage?”

Thus Napoleon addressed the half-starved and dejected legions who had been struggling for two years on the Maritime Alps against the Austrians and Sardinians in an apparently impossible attempt to gain a footing in Northern Italy. The army was little more than a mob of malcontents, lacking even the common necessities of life. Forty thousand outcasts, if you will, undisciplined, many of them without boots, more of them in tatters, all of them with scarcely a ray of hope; soldiers in name rather than in reality. Brave men and heroes there were, order and subordination there were not. To introduce cohesion and discipline into these unruly forces was the almost superhuman task Napoleon had undertaken.

He arrived at Nice, the headquarters of the Army of Italy,

on the 26th March 1796; he began to investigate the conditions of his problem the same day, issuing the above General Orders twenty-four hours afterwards. His allies were the mountains which separated him from his enemies; the Mediterranean which faced him was the highroad of the English squadron. A concerted effort on the part of the land and the maritime forces would most assuredly catch him like a rat in a trap. Fortunately the Austrians and Sardinians were suspicious of each other, their dispositions were faulty and not always in concert, and their forces were scattered over a long line of territory, defending the passes across the mountains. The officers viewed the Directory's choice of a commander with suspicion. If Schérer, a veteran over seventy years of age, had not been able to lead them to victory, what could be expected of this fledgling? They reckoned without their host. Genius knows no age and takes no count of birthdays. Napoleon's amazing fertility of resource, his astounding energy and thorough grip of the situation, gradually overcame their opposition whether acknowledged or only felt. Masséna, Augereau, Sérurier, Cervoni, La Harpe, and Rampon, to mention some of the more important, joined loyal hands with Napoleon's own chosen men, Murat, Berthier, Duroc, Marmont, and the fear-nothing Junot. We shall find many of these names occurring again and again, as the story develops and the career of the Master General expands. Few, if any, individuals succeed unaided, least of all the soldier and the statesman. Napoleon early recognised that the so-called self-made man is very rarely

entitled to the credit implied in the name. He fostered the ambitions of his colleagues, but saw to it that he was the chief gainer by them.

After having provided so far as was possible for the creature comforts of the troops and raised their drooping spirits by his enthusiasm and the promise of good things to come, the commander prepared to strike a quick and decisive blow at his enemies. The armies of the King of Sardinia and Piedmont and of the Emperor of the Holy Roman Empire were not united in one large body, but separated by more than thirty miles. The central idea of this arrangement was that in case of necessity each could fall back on the capital of the country they were defending, the Austrians on Milan and the Sardinians on Turin. The wiser way, as Viscount Wolseley points out, would have been to concentrate at a place commanding both cities, in the valley of the Eastern Bormida, for instance. Napoleon saw the folly of the plan, and determined to force his way between the two armies and fight them separately. "United," as he said, "the two forces would have been superior to the French army: separated, they were lost." Napoleon hurried troops along the rut-wrinkled road to Voltri, within easy march of Genoa, to give the impression that the latter place was about to be attacked. Meantime, however, he and the main body encamped at the foot of the mountains, above Savona. After strongly fortifying the pass of Montenotte, the Austrians occupying a ridge above the village of that name, he prepared to attack, and on the 12th April took the enemy

completely by surprise. The onset was deadly, the result certain. Masséna bore the brunt of the fight, the commander contenting himself with the highly important duty of preventing the enemy from reaching their Sardinian allies. The Imperialists were driven from the field with a loss of 700 dead and wounded. "My title of nobility," said Napoleon, "dates from the battle of Montenotte." Another Austrian defeat took place at Millesimo on the following day, and they were also ousted from the village of Dego, upon which they had fallen back, on the 14th.

Early on the morning of the 15th, an Austrian division, unaware of the disaster which had overtaken their comrades, seized Dego. Had not Napoleon acted with great promptitude, they might possibly have retrieved the defeat of the previous day. While Masséna and La Harpe bravely disputed the ground, Napoleon brought up reinforcements with an energy which alone saved the occasion. Having shattered this army, the Commander-in-chief turned his attention to the Sardinians at Ceva, under Colli, and at first met with a rebuff. Hoping to catch Napoleon in a trap, the enemy's camp was hastily broken up and the army marched off to occupy what the General fondly imagined were stronger positions. Defeat awaited them, however, at the hands of Sérurier and Dommartin, who came up with the Sardinians and forced them to fly towards Turin, their base of supplies. The town of Mondovi fell to the French, Marmont captured Cherasco. As a result of these operations, Savoy and Nice were ceded to France and the Austro-Sardinian alliance came to an abrupt

end. The important fortresses of Coni, Tortona, and Alessandria were surrendered to the French and others were demolished. These strategic positions have been called "the keys of the Alps," and were necessary to the success of Napoleon's next operations. The Commissioners who represented Sardinia would not willingly grant demands which they held to be extortionate and which left but two fortified places worthy of consideration to the dismembered State. Napoleon told them that it was for him to make conditions. "Listen to the laws which I impose upon you in the name of the Government of my country," he added, "or to-morrow my batteries are erected, and Turin is in flames." Arguments which can be backed by deeds are unanswerable. Parma, also on the losing side, likewise sued for peace, the arrangement being that she should furnish specie and supplies for the French army. Napoleon during the course of his negotiations made use of a striking phrase which explains another of the secrets of his success. "It may happen to me to lose battles," he remarked, "but no one shall ever see me lose minutes either by over-confidence or by sloth."

Having concluded his diplomatic measures, the General was now ready to turn his attention to his remaining enemy. Before doing so he thought it well to make a further appeal to the patriotic instincts of his troops. Triumphant as never before, they were nevertheless beginning to weary of the ceaseless marching and fighting:

"Soldiers! you have gained in fifteen days six victories,

taken twenty-one standards, fifty-five pieces of cannon, many strong places, and conquered the richest part of Piedmont. You have made fifteen thousand prisoners, and killed or wounded ten thousand men. Hitherto you have fought on barren rocks, illustrious, indeed, by your courage, but of no avail to your country. Now you rival by your services the Armies of Holland and of the Rhine. You were utterly destitute; you have supplied all your wants. You have gained battles without cannon; passed rivers without bridges; made forced marches without shoes; bivouacked without bread! The phalanxes of the Republic—the soldiers of liberty—were alone capable of such sacrifices. But, soldiers, you have accomplished nothing while anything remains to be done. Neither Turin nor Milan is in your hands; the ashes of the conqueror of Tarquin are still trampled on by the assassins of Basseville! I am told that there are some among you whose courage is failing, who would rather return to the summits of the Alps and the Appenines. No—I cannot believe it. The conquerors of Montenotte, of Millesimo, of Dego, of Mondovi burn to carry still further the glories of the French name! But, ere I lead you to conquest, there is one condition you must promise to fulfil; that is, to protect the people whom you liberate, and to repress all acts of lawless violence. Without this, you would not be the deliverers, but the scourge of nations. Invested with the national authority, strong in justice and law, I shall not hesitate to enforce the requisitions of humanity and of honour. I will not suffer robbers to sully your laurels. Pillagers shall be shot without

mercy.

“People of Italy! the French army advances to break your chains. The French people are the friends of all nations. In them you may confide. Your property, your religion, your customs shall be respected. We will only make war as generous foes. Our sole quarrel is with the tyrants who enslave you!”

Without losing unnecessary time, Napoleon entered Piacenza, crossed the river Po on a hastily-constructed bridge of boats in face of a hostile force, and prepared to take the village of Fombio. Here some 5,000 Austrian infantry and cavalry were prepared to make a stand. The place literally bristled with artillery, even the churches were fortified; but the French routed the enemy, and the Imperialists were forced to retire.

Behind the swiftly-flowing Adda a strong rear-guard was posted, and on the 10th May Napoleon appeared at Lodi, on the opposite bank. A narrow bridge, some 200 yards in length and thirty feet wide, was the only means of crossing the turbulent stream. At first the Austrians tried to hold the structure, then attempted to break it down, but the steady fire of the French prevented them from doing so. To cross to the opposite bank was absolutely essential for a decisive action, and Napoleon gave orders that a column of picked men should be sent to seize the bridge. He was told that such an attempt could not possibly succeed. “Impossible!” he is asserted to have cried, “that word is not French!” He started the column. It meant certain death to many, but in warfare men are simply fighting

machines controlled by the human dynamo at their head. The troops pressed forward. Those in front fell like leaves in autumn, as the shots from the opposite shore ploughed their ranks. Some of the most daring reached the middle of the bridge only to sink in a lifeless heap under the murderous hail. A retreat seemed inevitable, the bravest wavered.

Napoleon, quick to notice the slightest sign of weakness, again urged his troops forward. Lannes, Masséna, and Berthier, threw themselves into the thick of the fight, and shortly afterwards the bridge was carried. The rest was comparatively easy. The Austrian cannon were taken, the infantry which covered them was forced to give way, and the Imperialists again retreated, leaving 300 dead and wounded. It was in very truth a hard-fought field, for the victors lost a greater number of men. Had they been able to follow the retreating army, the triumph would have been complete. Napoleon declared that "it was not till after the terrible passage of the Bridge of Lodi that the idea flashed across my mind that I might become a decisive actor in the political arena. Then arose, for the first time, the spark of great ambition." It was after this battle that the soldiers nicknamed Napoleon "the little corporal." Sebottendorf, who commanded the defeated troops, bent his steps towards Mantua, to which Beaulieu, his superior officer, was also making his way.

CHAPTER IX

The Italian Campaign (1796–1797)

On the 15th May 1796, the conqueror and his troops entered Milan, the Austrians retiring behind the banks of the Mincio, a river inseparably associated with the history of the Roman Empire. He encouraged the soldiers by telling them that they had overwhelmed and dispersed everything which had opposed their progress, that the Republic had ordered *fêtes* to be given in honour of the victories, and that on their return home “fellow citizens will say of each of you in passing: ‘He was a soldier in the Army of Italy!’” He did not minimise the task before them, however, and bluntly asserted that much still remained to be done. “To restore the Capitol (at Rome); to replace there the statues of the heroes who have rendered it immortal; to rouse the Romans from centuries of slavery—such will be the fruit of our victories: they will form an era in history; to you will belong the glory of having changed the face of the most beautiful part of Europe.” Such a proclamation was well calculated to inspire the inhabitants with ideas of liberty as well as to encourage soldiers still flushed with victory. The satisfaction of the people at these honied words, however, gave way to consternation when the news was noised abroad that 20,000,000 francs was the price

of peace, to say nothing of free supplies for the troops. A futile flicker of resistance was shown by some of the more patriotic folk of Lombardy, who backed their opinions by force and came to blows with the pretended “liberators” at Milan and at Pavia. The retribution which followed swiftly, did not encourage other towns to rise; the Italian national spirit was but a weak thing then. The village of Brescia, although on Venetian and therefore neutral territory, was razed to the ground by fire. Napoleon himself marched on Pavia, which was carried by assault and sacked. Again Beaulieu attempted to check Napoleon, but he might as well have tried to prevent the sun from rising. The Austrians were defeated at Valeggio, Verona was entered by Masséna, and Napoleon prepared to lay siege to the well-fortified town of Mantua, the key to Austria and Italy. Fifteen thousand troops were detailed for the purpose in addition to those who were to guard their communications. After compelling the insurrectionists at Milan to surrender, he entered Modena and Bologna, and sent Murat to Leghorn, thus violating the neutral territory of Tuscany.

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