

LOUIS DE BOURRIENNE

MEMOIRS OF NAPOLEON
BONAPARTE — VOLUME
16

Louis Antoine Fauvelet Bourrienne
Memoirs of Napoleon
Bonaparte — Volume 16

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Louis Antoine Fauvelet de Bourrienne Memoirs of Napoleon Bonaparte — Volume 16

CHAPTER XIII

—[This chapter; by the editor of the 1836 edition, is based upon the 'Memorial', and O'Meara's and Antommarchi's works.]—

1815-1821.

Voyage to St. Helena—Personal traits of the Emperor—Arrival at James Town—Napoleon's temporary residence at The Briars—Removal to Longwood—The daily routine there—The Campaign of Italy—The arrival of Sir Hudson Lowe—Unpleasant relations between the Emperor and the new Governor—Visitors at St. Helena—Captain Basil Hall's interview with Napoleon—Anecdotes of the Emperor—Departure of Las Cases and O'Meara—Arrivals from Europe—Physical habits of the Emperor—Dr. Antommarchi—The Emperor's toilet—Creation of a new bishopric—The Emperor's energy with the spade—His increasing illness—Last days of Napoleon—His Death

—Lying in state—Military funeral— Marchand's account of the Emperor's last moments—Napoleon's last bequests —The Watch of Rivoli.

The closing scenes in the life of the great Emperor only now remain to be briefly touched upon. In a previous chapter we have narrated the surrender of Napoleon, his voyage to England, and his transference from the *Bellerophon* to the *Northumberland*. The latter vessel was in great confusion from the short notice at which she had sailed, and for the two first days the crew was employed in restoring order. The space abaft the mizenmast contained a dining-room about ten feet broad, and extending the whole width of the ship, a saloon, and two cabins. The Emperor occupied the cabin on the left; in which his camp-bedstead had been put up; that on the right was appropriated to the Admiral. It was peremptorily enjoined that the saloon should be in common. The form of the dining-table resembled that of the dining-room. Napoleon sat with his back to the saloon; on his left sat Madame Bertrand, and on his right the Admiral, who, with Madame de Montholon, filled up one side of the table. Next that lady, but at the end of the table, was Captain Ross, who commanded the ship, and at the opposite end M. de Montholon; Madame Bertrand, and the Admiral's secretary. The side of the table facing the Emperor was occupied by the Grand-Marshal, the Colonel of the field Regiment, Las Cases, and Gourgaud. The Admiral invited one or two of the officers to dinner every day, and the band of the 53d, newly-formed, played during dinner-time.

On the 10th of August the Northumberland cleared the Channel, and lost sight of land. The course of the ship was shaped to cross the Bay of Biscay and double Cape Finisterre. The wind was fair, though light, and the heat excessive. Napoleon breakfasted in his own cabin at irregular hours. He sent for one of his attendants every morning to know the distance run, the state of the wind, and other particulars connected with their progress. He read a great deal, dressed towards four o'clock, and then came into the public saloon; here he played at chess with one of the party; at five o'clock the Admiral announced that dinner was on the table. It is well known that Napoleon was scarcely ever more than fifteen minutes at dinner; here the two courses alone took up nearly an hour and a half. This was a serious annoyance to him, though his features and manner always evinced perfect equanimity. Neither the new system of cookery nor the quality of the dishes ever met with his censure. He was waited on by two valets, who stood behind his chair. At first the Admiral was in the habit of offering several dishes to the Emperor, but the acknowledgment of the latter was expressed so coldly that the practice was given up. The Admiral thenceforth only pointed out to the servants what was preferable. Napoleon was generally silent, as if unacquainted with the language, though it was French. If he spoke, it was to ask some technical or scientific question, or to address a few words to those whom the Admiral occasionally asked to dinner.

The Emperor rose immediately after coffee had been handed

round, and went on deck, followed by the Grand-Marshal and Las Cases. This disconcerted Admiral Cockburn, who expressed his surprise to his officers; but Madame Bertrand, whose maternal language was English, replied with spirit, "Do not forget, sir, that your guest is a man who has governed a large portion of the world, and that kings once contended for the honour of being admitted to his table."—"Very true," rejoined the Admiral; and from that time he did his utmost to comply with Napoleon's habits. He shortened the time of sitting at table, ordering coffee for Napoleon and those who accompanied him even before the rest of the company had finished their dinner. The Emperor remained walking on deck till dark. On returning to the after-cabin he sat down to play *vingt et un* with some of his suite, and generally retired in about half an hour. On the morning of the 15th of August all his suite asked permission to be admitted to his presence. He was not aware of the cause of this visit; it was his birthday, which seemed to have altogether escaped his recollection.

On the following day they doubled Cape Finisterre, and up to the 21st, passing off the Straits of Gibraltar, continued their course along the coast of Africa towards Madeira. Napoleon commonly remained in his cabin the whole morning, and from the extreme heat he wore a very slight dress. He could not sleep well, and frequently rose in the night. Reading was his chief occupation. He often sent for Count Las Cases to translate whatever related to St. Helena or the countries by which they

were sailing. Napoleon used to start a subject of conversation; or revive that of some preceding day, and when he had taken eight or nine turns the whole length of the deck he would seat himself on the second gun from the gangway on the larboard side. The midshipmen soon observed this habitual predilection, so that the cannon was thenceforth called the Emperor's gun. It was here that Napoleon often conversed for hours together.

On the 22d of August they came within sight of Madeira, and at night arrived off the port. They stopped for a day or two to take in provisions. Napoleon was indisposed. A sudden gale arose and the air was filled with small particles of sand and the suffocating exhalations from the deserts of Africa. On the evening of the 24th they got under weigh again, and progressed smoothly and rapidly. The Emperor added to his amusements a game at piquet. He was but an, indifferent chess- player, and there was no very good one on board. He asked, jestingly, "How it was that he frequently beat those who beat better players than himself?" Vingt et un was given up, as they played too high at it; and Napoleon had a great aversion to gaming. One night a negro threw himself overboard to avoid a flogging, which occasioned a great noise and bustle. A young midshipman meeting Las Cases descending into the cabin, and thinking he was going to inform Napoleon, caught hold of his coat and in a tone of great concern exclaimed, "Ah sir, do not alarm the Emperor! Tell him the noise is owing to an accident!" In general the midshipmen behaved with marked respect and attention to Bonaparte, and often by

signs or words directed the sailors to avoid incommoding him: He sometimes noticed this conduct, and remarked that youthful hearts were always prone to generous instincts.

On the 1st of September they found themselves in the latitude of the Cape de Verd Islands. Everything now promised a prosperous passage, but the time hung heavily. Las Cases had undertaken to teach his son English, and the Emperor also expressed a wish to learn. He, however, soon grew tired and laid it aside, nor was it resumed until long afterwards. His manners and habits were always the same; he invariably appeared contented, patient, and good-humoured. The Admiral gradually laid aside his reserve, and took an interest in his great captive. He pointed out the danger incurred by coming on deck after dinner, owing to the damp of the evening: the Emperor, would then sometimes take his arm and prolong the conversation, talking sometimes on naval affairs, on the French resources in the south, and on the improvements he had contemplated in the ports and harbours of the Mediterranean, to all which the Admiral listened with deep attention.

Meanwhile Napoleon observed that Las Cases was busily employed, and obtained a sight of his journal, with which he was not displeased. He, however, noticed that some of the military details and anecdotes gave but a meagre idea of the subject of war: This first led to the proposal of his writing his own Memoirs. At length the Emperor came to a determination, and on Saturday, the 9th of September he called his secretary into his

cabin and dictated to him some particulars of the siege of Toulon. On approaching the line they fell in with the trade- winds, that blow here constantly from the east. On the 16th there was a considerable fall of rain, to the great joy of the sailors, who were in want of water. The rain began to fall heavily just as the Emperor had got upon deck to take his afternoon walk. But this did not disappoint him of his usual exercise; he merely called for his famous gray greatcoat, which the crew regarded with much interest.

On the 23d of September they passed the line. This was a day of great merriment and disorder among the crew: it was the ceremony which the English sailors call the "christening." No one is spared; and the officers are generally more roughly handled than any one else. The Admiral, who had previously amused himself by giving an alarming description of this ceremony, now very courteously exempted his guests from the inconvenience and ridicule attending it. Napoleon was scrupulously respected through the whole of this Saturnalian festivity. On being informed of the decorum which had been observed with regard to him he ordered a hundred Napoleons to be presented to the grotesque- Neptune and his crew; which the Admiral opposed, perhaps from motives of prudence as well as politeness.

Owing to the haste with which they had left England the painting of the ship had been only lately finished, and this circumstance confined Napoleon, whose sense of smell was very acute, to his room for two days. They were now, in the beginning

of October, driven into the Gulf of Guinea, where they met a French vessel bound for the Isle of Bourbon. They spoke with the captain, who expressed his surprise and regret when he learnt that Napoleon was on board. The wind was unfavourable, and the ship made little progress. The sailors grumbled at the Admiral, who had gone out of the usual course. At length they approached the termination of their voyage. On the 14th of October the Admiral had informed them that he expected to come within sight of St. Helena that day. They had scarcely risen from table when their ears were saluted with the cry of "land!" This was within a quarter of an hour of the time that had been fixed on. The Emperor went on the forecastle to see the island; but it was still hardly distinguishable. At daybreak next morning they had a tolerably clear view of it.

At length, about seventy days after his departure from England, and a hundred and ten after quitting Paris, Napoleon reached St. Helena. In the harbour were several vessels of the squadron which had separated from them, and which they thought they had left behind. Napoleon, contrary to custom, dressed early and went upon deck: he went forward to the gangway to view the island. He beheld a kind of village surrounded by numerous barren hills towering to the clouds. Every platform, every aperture, the brow of every hill was planted with cannon. The Emperor viewed the prospect through his glass. His countenance underwent no change. He soon left the deck; and sending for Las Cases, proceeded to his day's work.

The Admiral, who had gone ashore very early, returned about six much fatigued. He had been walking over various parts of the island, and at length thought he had found a habitation that would suit his captives. The place stood in need of repairs, which might occupy two months. His orders were not to let the French quit the vessel till a house should be prepared to receive them. He, however, undertook, on his own responsibility, to set them on shore the next day.

On the 16th, after dinner, Napoleon, accompanied by the Admiral and the Grand-Marshal, Bertrand, got into a boat to go ashore. As he passed, the officers assembled on the quarter-deck, and the greater part of the crew on the gangways. The Emperor, before he stepped into the boat, sent for the captain of the vessel, and took leave of him, desiring him at the same time to convey his thanks to the officers and crew. These words appeared to produce the liveliest sensation in all by whom they were understood, or to whom they were interpreted. The remainder of his suite landed about eight. They found the Emperor in the apartments which had been assigned to him, a few minutes after he went upstairs to his chamber. He was lodged in a sort of inn in James Town, which consists only, of one short street, or row of houses built in a narrow valley between two rocky hills.

The next day the Emperor, the Grand-Marshal, and the Admiral, riding out to visit Longwood, which had been chosen for the Emperor's residence, on their return saw a small villa, with a pavilion attached to it, about two miles from the town,

the residence of Mr. Balcombe; a merchant of the island. This spot pleased Napoleon, and the Admiral was of opinion that it would be better for him to remain here than to return to the town, where the sentinels at his door, with the crowds collected round it, in a manner confined him to his chamber. The pavilion was a sort of summer-house on a pyramidal eminence, about thirty or forty paces from the house, where the family were accustomed to resort in fine weather: this was hired for the temporary abode of the Emperor, and he took possession of it immediately. There was a carriage-road from the town, and the valley was in this part less rugged in its aspect. Las Cases was soon sent for. As he ascended the winding path leading to the pavilion he saw Napoleon standing at the threshold of the door. His body was slightly bent, and his hands behind his back: he wore his usual plain and simple uniform and the well-known hat. The Emperor was alone. He took a fancy to walk a little; but there was no level ground on any side of the pavilion, which was surrounded by huge pieces of rock. Taking the arm of his companion, however, he began to converse in a cheerful strain. When Napoleon was about to retire to rest the servants found that one of the windows was open close to the bed: they barricaded it as well as they could, so as to exclude the air, to the effects of which the Emperor was very susceptible. Las Cases ascended to an upper room. The valets de chambres lay stretched in their cloaks across the threshold of the door. Such was the first night Napoleon passed at the Briars.

An English officer was lodged with them in the house as their guard, and two non-commissioned officers were stationed near the house to watch their movements. Napoleon the next day proceeded with his dictation, which occupied him for several hours, and then took a walk in the garden, where he was met by the two Misses Balcombe, lively girls about fourteen years of age, who presented him with flowers, and overwhelmed him with whimsical questions. Napoleon was amused by their familiarity, to which he had been little accustomed. "We have been to a masked ball," said he, when the young ladies had taken their leave.

The next day a chicken was brought for breakfast, which the Emperor undertook to carve himself, and was surprised at his succeeding so well, it being a long time since he had done so much. The coffee he considered so bad that on tasting it he thought himself poisoned, and sent it away.

The mornings were passed in business; in the evening Napoleon sometimes strolled to the neighbouring villa, where the young ladies made him play at whist. The Campaign of Italy was nearly finished, and Las Cases proposed that the other followers of Napoleon who were lodged in the town should come up every morning to assist in transcribing The Campaign of Egypt, the History of the Consulate, etc. This suggestion pleased the ex-Emperor, so that from that time one or two of his suite came regularly every day to write to his dictation, and stayed to dinner. A tent, sent by the Colonel of the 53d Regiment, was spread out

so as to form a prolongation of the pavillion. Their cook took up his abode at the Briars. The table linen was taken from the trunks, the plate was set forth, and the first dinner after these new arrangements was a sort of fete.

One day at dinner Napoleon, casting his eye on one of the dishes of his own campaign-service, on which the-arms of the King had been engraved, "How they have spoiled that!" he exclaimed; and he could not refrain from observing that the King was in great haste to take possession of the Imperial plate, which certainly did not belong to him. Amongst the baggage was also a cabinet in which were a number of medallions, given him by the Pope and other potentates, some letters of Louis XVIII. which he had left behind him on his writing-table in the suddenness of his flight from the Tuileries on the 20th of March, and a number of other letters found in the portfolio of Dia Blacas intended to calumniate Napoleon.

The Emperor never dressed until about four o'clock he then walked in the garden, which was particularly agreeable to him on account of its solitude—the English soldiers having been removed at Mr. Balcombe's request. A little arbour was covered with canvas; and a chair and table placed in it, and here Napoleon dictated a great part of his Memoirs. In the evening, when he did not go out, he generally contrived to prolong the conversation till eleven or twelve o'clock.

Thus time passed with little variety or interruption. The weather in the winter became delightful. One day, his usual task

being done; Napoleon strolled out towards the town, until he came within sight of the road and shipping. On his return he met Mrs. Balcombe and a Mrs. Stuart, who was on her way back from Bombay to England. The Emperor conversed with her on the manners and customs of India, and on the inconveniences of a long voyage at sea, particularly to ladies. He alluded to Scotland, Mrs. Stuart's native country, expatiated on the genius of Ossian, and congratulated his fair interlocutor on the preservation of her clear northern complexion. While the parties were thus engaged some heavily burdened slaves passed near to them. Mrs. Balcombe motioned them to make a detour; but Napoleon interposed, exclaiming, "Respect the burden, madam!" As he said this the Scotch lady, who had been very eagerly scanning the features of Napoleon, whispered to her friend, "Heavens! what a character, and what an expression of countenance! How different to the idea I had formed of him!"

Napoleon shortly after repeated the same walk, and went into the house of Major Hudson. This visit occasioned considerable alarm to the constituted authorities.

The Governor gave a ball, to which the French were invited; and Las Cases about the same time rode over to Longwood to see what advance had been made in the preparations for their reception. His report on his return was not very favourable. They had now been six weeks at the Briars, during which Napoleon had been nearly as much confined as if on board the vessel. His health began to be impaired by it. Las Cases gave it as his opinion that

the Emperor did not possess that constitution of iron which was usually ascribed to him; and that it was the strength of his mind, not of his body, that carried him through the labours of the field and of the cabinet. In speaking on this subject Napoleon himself observed that. nature had endowed him with two peculiarities: one was the power of sleeping at any hour or in any place; the other, his being incapable of committing any excess either in eating or drinking: "If," said he, "I go the least beyond my mark my stomach instantly revolts." He was subject to nausea from very slight causes, and to colds from any change of air.

The prisoners removed to Longwood on the 10th of December 1815. Napoleon invited Mr. Balcombe to breakfast with him that morning, and conversed with him in a very cheerful manner. About two Admiral Cockburn was announced; he entered with an air of embarrassment. In consequence of the restraints imposed upon him at the Briars, and the manner in which those of his suite residing in the town had been treated, Bonaparte had discontinued receiving the visits of the Admiral; yet on the present occasion he behaved towards him as though nothing had happened. At length they left the Briars and set out for Longwood. Napoleon rode the horse, a small, sprightly, and tolerably handsome animal, which had been brought for him from the Cape. He wore his uniform of the Chasseurs of the Guard, and his graceful manner and handsome countenance were particularly remarked. The Admiral was very attentive to him. At the entrance of Longwood they found a guard under arms who

rendered the prescribed honours to their illustrious captive. His horse, unaccustomed to parades, and frightened by the roll of the drum, refused to pass the gate till spurred on by Napoleon, while a significant look passed among the escort. The Admiral took great pains to point out the minutest details at Longwood. He had himself superintended all the arrangements, among which was a bath-room. Bonaparte was satisfied with everything, and the Admiral seemed highly pleased. He had anticipated petulance and disdain, but Napoleon manifested perfect good-humour.

The entrance to the house was through a room which had been just built to answer the double purpose of an ante-chamber and a dining-room. This apartment led to the drawing-room; beyond this was a third room running in a cross direction and very dark. This was intended to be the depository of the Emperor's maps and books, but it was afterwards converted into the dining-room. The Emperor's chamber opened into this apartment on the right hand side, and was divided into two equal parts, forming a cabinet and sleeping-room; a little external gallery served for a bathing-room: Opposite the Emperor's chamber, at the other extremity of the building, were the apartments of Madame Montholon, her husband, and her son, afterward used as the Emperors library. Detached from this part of the house was a little square room on the ground floor, contiguous to the kitchen, which was assigned to Las Cases. The windows and beds had no curtains. The furniture was mean and scanty. Bertrand and his family resided at a distance of two miles, at a place called

Rut's Gate. General Gourgaud slept under a tent, as well as Mr. O'Meara, and the officer commanding the guard. The house was surrounded by a garden. In front, and separated by a tolerably deep ravine, was encamped the 53d Regiment, different parties of which were stationed on the neighbouring heights.

The domestic establishment of the Emperor consisted of eleven persons. To the Grand-Marshal was confided the general superintendence; to M. de Montholon the domestic details; Las Cases was to take care of the furniture and property, and General Gourgaud to have the management of the stables. These arrangements, however, produced discontent among Napoleon's attendants. Las Cases admits that they were no longer the members of one family, each using his best efforts to promote the advantage of all. They were far from practising that which necessity dictated. He says also, "The Admiral has more than once, in the midst of our disputes with him, hastily exclaimed that the Emperor was decidedly the most good-natured, just, and reasonable of the whole set."

On his first arrival he went to visit the barracks occupied by some Chinese living on the island, and a place called Longwood Farm. He complained to Las Cases that they had been idle of late; but by degrees their hours and the employment of them became fixed and regular. The Campaign of Italy being now finished, Napoleon corrected it, and dictated on other subjects. This was their morning's work. They dined between eight and nine, Madame Montholon being seated on Napoleon's right; Las

Cases on his left, and Gourgaud, Montholon, and Las Cases' son sitting opposite. The smell of the paint not being yet gone off, they remained not more than ten minutes at table, and the dessert was prepared in the adjoining apartment, where coffee was served up and conversation commenced. Scenes were read from Moliere, Racine, and Voltaire; and regret was always expressed at their not having a copy of Corneille. They then played at 'reversis', which had been Bonaparte's favourite game in his youth. The recollection was agreeable to him, and he thought he could amuse himself at it for any length of time, but was soon undeceived. His aim was always to make the 'reversis', that is, to win every trick. Character is displayed in the smallest incidents.

Napoleon read a libel on himself, and contrasted the compliments which had passed between him and the Queen of Prussia with the brutal- behaviour ascribed to him in the English newspapers. On the other hand, two common sailors had at different times, while he was at Longwood and at the Briars, in spite of orders and at all risks, made their way through the sentinels to gain a sight of Napoleon. On seeing the interest they took in him he exclaimed, "This is fanaticism! Yes, imagination rules the world!"

The instructions of the English Ministers with regard to the treatment of Napoleon at St. Helena had been prepared with the view completely to secure his person. An English officer was to be constantly at his table. This order, however, was not carried into effect. An officer was also to accompany Napoleon

in all his rides; this order was dispensed with within certain prescribed limits, because Napoleon had refused to ride at all on such conditions. Almost everyday brought with it some new cause of uneasiness and complaint. Sentinels were posted beneath Napoleon's windows and before his doors. This order was, however, doubtless given to prevent his being annoyed by impertinent curiosity. The French were certainly precluded from all free communication with the inhabitants of the island; but this precaution was of unquestionable necessity for the security of the Emperor's person. Las Cases complains that the passwords were perpetually changed, so that they lived in constant perplexity and apprehension of being subjected to some unforeseen insult. "Napoleon," he continues, "addressed a complaint to the Admiral, which obtained for him no redress. In the midst of these complaints the Admiral wished to introduce some ladies (who had arrived in the Doric) to Napoleon; but he declined, not approving this alternation of affronts and civilities." He, however, consented, at the request of their Colonel, to receive the officers of the 53d Regiment. After this officer took his leave. Napoleon prolonged his walk in the garden. He stopped awhile to look at a flower in one of the beds, and asked his companion if it was not a lily. It was indeed a magnificent one. The thought that he had in his mind was obvious. He then spoke of the number of times he had been wounded; and said it had been thought he had never met with these accidents from his having kept them secret as much as possible.'

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