

**RECOLLECTIONS OF THE
PRIVATE LIFE
OF NAPOLEON, Complete**

By CONSTANT

**PREMIER VALET DE CHAMBRE
WALTER CLARK**

TRANSLATED BY

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PREFACE.

Though this work was first published in 1830, it has never before been translated into English. Indeed, the volumes are almost out of print. When in Paris a few years ago the writer secured, with much difficulty, a copy, from which this translation has been made. Notes have been added by the translator, and illustrations by the publishers, which, it is believed, will enhance the interest of the original work by Constant.

"To paint Caesar in undress is not to paint Caesar," some one has said. Yet men will always like to see the great 'en deshabelle'. In these volumes the hero is painted in undress. His foibles, his peculiarities,

his vices, are here depicted without reserve. But so also are his kindness of heart, his vast intellect, his knowledge of men, his extraordinary energy, his public spirit. The shutters are taken down, and the workings of the mighty machinery are laid bare.

The late Prince Napoleon (who was more truly "the nephew of his uncle" than was Napoleon III.), in his *Napoleon and His Detractors*, bitterly assails this work of Constants attacking both its authenticity and the correctness of its statements. But there appears no good reason to doubt its genuineness, and the truthfulness of many of its details is amply supported by other authorities. Notwithstanding its excesses and follies, the great French Revolution will ever have an absorbing interest for mankind, because it began as a struggle for the advancement of the cause of manhood, liberty, and equal rights. It was a terribly earnest movement; and, after the lapse of a century, interest continues unabated in the great soldier who restored order, and organized and preserved the new ideas by means of his Civil Code and a firm government.

Countless memoirs have been published by those who lived in those heroic times. Yet everything which will cast new light upon the chief actors in that great drama of humanity is still seized upon with avidity, especially whatever concerns the Emperor.

This is not merely because he was a great conqueror; for such were, after their fashion, Genghis Khan and Timour, and hundreds of others. But it is because of the human interest which attaches to the wonderful career of Napoleon and the events of which he was the central figure.

Never did poet or novelist imagine scenes so improbable. The son of an obscure lawyer in an unimportant island becomes Emperor of the French and King of Italy. His brothers and sisters become kings and queens. The sons of innkeepers, notaries; lawyers, and peasants become marshals of the empire. The Emperor, first making a West India Creole his wife and Empress, puts her away, and marries a daughter of the haughtiest and oldest royal house in Europe, the niece of a queen whom the people of France had beheaded a few years before. Their son is born a king—King of Rome. Then suddenly the pageantry dissolves, and Emperor, kings, and queens become subjects again. Has imagination ever dreamed anything wilder than this? The dramatic interest of this story will always attract, but there is a deeper one. The secret spring of all those rapid changes, and the

real cause of the great interest humanity will always feel in the story of those eventful times, is to be found in Napoleon's own explanation—"A career open to talents, without distinction of birth." Till that day the accident of birth was the key to every honor and every position. No man could hold even a lieutenancy in the army who could not show four quarterings on his coat of arms.

It was as the "armed apostle of democracy" that Napoleon went forth conquering and to conquer. He declared at St. Helena that he "had always marched supported by the opinions of six millions of men."

The old woman who met him incognito climbing the hill of Tarare, and replying to his assertion that "Napoleon was only a tyrant like the rest," exclaimed, "It may be so, but the others are the kings of the nobility, while he is one of us, and we have chosen him ourselves," expressed a great truth. As long as Napoleon represented popular sovereignty he was invincible; but when, deeming himself strong enough to stand alone, he endeavored to conciliate the old order of things, and, divorcing the daughter of the people, took for a bride the daughter of kings and allied himself with them—at that moment, like another Samson, "his strength departed from him." Disasters came as they had come to him before, but this time the heart of the people was no longer with him. He fell.

This man has been studied as a soldier, a statesman, an organizer, a politician. In all he was undeniably great. But men will always like to know something about him as a man. Can he stand that ordeal? These volumes will answer that question. They are written by one who joined the First Consul at the Hospice on Mt. St. Bernard, on his way to Marengo, in June, 1800, and who was with him as his chief personal attendant, day and night, never leaving him "any more than his shadow" (eight days only) excepted until that eventful day, fourteen years later, when, laying aside the sceptre of the greatest empire the world had known for seventeen centuries, he walked down the horseshoe steps at Fontainebleau in the presence of the soldiers whom he had led to victory from Madrid to Moscow, once more a private citizen.

That men of Anglo-Saxon speech may have an opportunity to see and judge the Emperor from "close at hand," and view him as he appeared in the eyes of his personal attendants, these volumes have been translated, and are now submitted to the public. Though the

remark of Frederick the Great that "No man is a hero to his valet" is not altogether borne out in this instance, still it will be seen that there is here nothing of that "divinity which doth hedge a king." In these volumes Napoleon appears as a man, a very great man, still a mere man, not, a demigod. Their perusal will doubtless lead to a truer conception of his character, as manifested both in his good and in his evil traits. The former were natural to him; the latter were often produced by the exceptional circumstances which surrounded him, and the extraordinary temptations to which he was subjected.

Certainly a truer and fuller light is cast by these volumes, upon the colossal figure which will always remain one of the most interesting studies in all human history.

THE TRANSLATOR.

INTRODUCTION.

By Constant.

The career of a man compelled to make his own way, who is not an artisan or in some trade, does not usually begin till he is about twenty years of age. Till then he vegetates, uncertain of his future, neither having, nor being able to have, any well-defined purpose. It is only when he has arrived at the full development of his powers, and his character and bent of mind are shown, that he can determine his profession or calling. Not till then does he know himself, and see his way open before him. In fact, it is only then that he begins to live.

Reasoning in this manner, my life from my twentieth year has been thirty years, which can be divided into equal parts, so far as days and months are counted, but very unequal parts, considering the events which transpired in each of those two periods of my life.

Attached to the person of the Emperor Napoleon for fifteen years, I have seen all the men, and witnessed all the important events, which centered around him. I have seen far more than that; for I have had under my eyes all the circumstances of his life, the least as well as the greatest, the most secret as well as those which are known to

history,—I have had, I repeat, incessantly under my eyes the man whose name, solitary and alone, fills the most glorious pages of our history. Fifteen years I followed him in his travels and his campaigns, was at his court, and saw him in the privacy of his family. Whatever step he wished to take, whatever order he gave, it was necessarily very difficult for the Emperor not to admit me, even though involuntarily, into his confidence; so that without desiring it, I have more than once found myself in the possession of secrets I should have preferred not to know. What wonderful things happened during those fifteen years! Those near the Emperor lived as if in the center of a whirlwind; and so quick was the succession of overwhelming events, that one felt dazed, as it were, and if he wished to pause and fix his attention for a moment, there instantly came, like another flood, a succession of events which carried him along with them without giving him time to fix his thoughts.

Succeeding these times of activity which made one's brain whirl, there came to me the most absolute repose in an isolated retreat where I passed another interval of fifteen years after leaving the Emperor. But what a contrast! To those who have lived, like myself, amid the conquests and wonders of the Empire, what is left to-day? If the strength of our manhood was passed amid the bustle of years so short, yet so fully occupied, our careers were sufficiently long and fruitful, and it is time to give ourselves up to repose. We can withdraw from the world, and close our eyes. Can it be possible to see anything equal to what we have seen? Such scenes do not come twice in the lifetime of any man; and having seen them, they suffice to occupy his memory through all his remaining years, and in retirement he can find nothing better to occupy his leisure moments than the recollections of what he has witnessed.

Thus it has been with me. The reader will readily believe that I have had no greater pleasure than that of recalling the memories of the years passed in the service of the Emperor. As far as possible, I have kept myself informed as to everything that has been written of my former master, his family, and his court; and while listening to these narrations read by my wife and sister at our fireside, the long evenings have passed like an instant! When I found in these books, some of which are truly only miserable rhapsodies, statements which were incorrect, false, or slanderous, I, took pleasure in correcting such statements, or in showing their absurdity. My wife, who lived, as

I did, in the midst of these events, also made her corrections, and, without other object than our own satisfaction, made notes of our joint observations.

All who came to see us in our retreat, and took pleasure in having me narrate what I had seen, were astonished and often indignant at the falsehoods with which ignorance or malevolence had calumniated the Emperor and the Empire, and expressing their gratitude for the correct information I was able to give them, advised me also to furnish it to the public. But I attached no importance to the suggestion, and was far from dreaming that some day I should be the author of a book, until M. Ladvocat came to our hermitage, and urged me earnestly to publish my memoirs, offering himself to become the publisher.

At the very time my wife and I received this unexpected visit, we were reading together the Memoirs of Bourrienne, which the Ladvocat publishing-house had just issued; and we had remarked more than once how exempt these Memoirs were from both that spirit of disparagement and of adulation which we had noticed with disgust in other books on the same subject. M. Ladvocat advised me to complete the sketch of the Emperor, which, owing to his elevated position and habitual occupations, Bourrienne had been able to make only from a political point of view; and in accordance with his advice, I shall relate in simple words, and in a manner suited to my relations with the Emperor, those things which Bourrienne has necessarily omitted, and which no one could know so well as I.

I candidly admit that my objections to M. Ladvocat's advice were entirely overcome when he called my attention to this passage in the introduction to Bourrienne's memoirs: "If every one who had any relations with Napoleon, whatever the time and place, will accurately and without prejudice record what he saw and heard, the future historian of his life will be rich in materials. I hope that whoever undertakes that difficult task will find in my notes some information which may be useful in perfecting his work."

Having re-read these lines attentively, I said to myself that I could furnish memoranda and information which would refute errors, brand falsehoods, and bring to light what I knew to be the truth. In a word, I felt that I could give in my testimony, and that it was my duty to do so, in the long trial which has been held ever since the overthrow of the Emperor; for I had been an eye-witness, had seen everything, and

could say, "I was there." Others also have been close to the Emperor and his court, and I may often repeat what they have said, for the feats which they describe I had the same opportunity of witnessing; but, on the other hand, whatever I know of private matters, and whatever I may reveal which was secret and unknown, no one till this time could possibly have known, or consequently have related.

From the departure of the First Consul for the campaign of Marengo, whither I went with him, until the departure from Fontainebleau, when I was compelled to leave him, I was absent only twice, once for three days and once for seven or eight days. Excepting these short leaves of absence, the latter of which was on account of my health, I quitted the Emperor no more than his shadow.

It has been said that no one is a hero to his valet de chambre. I beg leave to dissent from this. The Emperor, as near as I was to him, was always a hero; and it was a great advantage also to see the man as he was. At a distance you were sensible only of the prestige of his glory and his power; but on getting closer to him you enjoyed, besides, the surprising charm of his conversation, the entire simplicity of his family life, and I do not hesitate to say, the habitual kindness of his character.

The reader, if curious to learn beforehand in what spirit these Memoirs are written, will perhaps read with interest this passage of a letter that I wrote to my publisher:

"Bourrienne had, perhaps, reason for treating Napoleon, as a public man, with severity. But we view him from different standpoints, and I speak only of the hero in undress. He was then almost always kind, patient, and rarely unjust. He was much attached to those about him, and received with kindness and good nature the services of those whom he liked. He was a man of habit. It is as a devoted servant that I wish to speak of the Emperor, and in no wise as a critic. It is not, however, an apotheosis in several volumes that I wish to write: for I am on this point somewhat like fathers who recognize the faults of their children, and reprove them earnestly, while at the same time they are ready to make excuses for their errors."

I trust that I shall be pardoned the familiarity, or, if you will, the inappropriateness of this comparison, for the sake of the feeling which dictates it. Besides, I do not propose either to praise or blame, but simply to relate that which fell within my knowledge, without trying to prejudice the opinion of any one.

I cannot close this introduction without a few words as to myself, in reply to the calumnies which have not spared, even in his retirement, a man who should have no enemies, if, to be protected from malice, it were sufficient to have done a little good, and no harm to any one. I am reproached with having abandoned my master after his fall, and not having shared his exile. I will show that, if I did not follow the Emperor, it was because I lacked not the will but the power to do so. God knows that I do not wish to undervalue the devotion of the faithful servants who followed the fortunes of the Emperor to the end. However, it is not improper to say that, however terrible the fall of the Emperor was for him, the situation (I speak here only of the personal advantages), in the island of Elba, of those who remained in his service, and who were not detained in France by an inexorable necessity, was still not without its advantages; and it was not, therefore, my personal interests which caused me to leave him. I shall explain hereafter my reasons for quitting his service.

I shall also give the truth as to the alleged abuse of confidence, of which, according to others, I was guilty in respect to the Emperor. A simple statement of the mistake which gave rise to this falsehood, I trust, will clear me of every suspicion of indelicacy; but if it is necessary to add other proofs, I could obtain them from those who lived nearest to the Emperor, and who were in a condition to both know and understand what passed between us; and lastly, I invoke fifty years of a blameless life, and I can say: "When I was in a situation to render great services, I did so; but I never sold them. I could have derived advantages from the petitions that I made for people, who, in consequence of my solicitations, have acquired immense fortunes; but I refused even the proper acknowledgment which in, their gratitude (very deep at that time) they felt compelled to offer me, by proposing an interest in their enterprises. I did not seek to take advantage, for my own benefit, of the generosity with which the Emperor so long deigned to honor me, in order to enrich or secure places for my relatives; and I retired poor after fifteen years passed in the personal service of the richest and most powerful monarch of Europe."

Having made these statements, I shall await with confidence the judgment of my readers.

RECOLLECTIONS OF THE PRIVATE LIFE OF NAPOLEON

VOLUME I.

CHAPTER I.

I shall refer to myself very little in these memoirs, for I am aware the public will examine them only for details concerning the great man to whom fortune attached me for sixteen years, and whom I scarcely quitted during the whole of that time. Notwithstanding, I ask permission to say a few words as to my childhood, and the

circumstances which made me valet de chambre of the Emperor.

I was born Dec. 2, 1778, at Peruelz, a town which became French on the annexation of Belgium to the Republic, and which then belonged to the Department of Jemmapes. Soon after my birth at the baths of Saint Amand, my father took charge of a small establishment called the Little Chateau, at which visitors to the waters were boarding, being aided in this enterprise by the Prince de Croi, in whose house he had been steward. Business prospered beyond my father's hopes, for a great number of invalids of rank came to his house. When I attained my eleventh year, the Count de Lure, head of one of the chief families of Valenciennes, happened to be one of the boarders at the Little Chateau; and as that excellent man had taken a great fancy to me, he asked my parents permission that I should become a companion to his son, who was about the same age. My family had intended me for the church, to gratify one of my uncles, who was Dean of Lessine, a man of great wisdom and rigid virtue; and thinking that the offer of the Count de Lure would not affect my intended destination, my father accepted it, judging that some years passed in a family so distinguished would give me a taste for the more serious studies necessary to fit me for the priesthood. I set out, therefore, with the Count de Lure, much grieved at leaving my parents, but pleased also at the same time, as is usual with one at my age, with new scenes. The count took me to one of his estates near Tours, where I was received with the greatest kindness by the countess and her children, with whom I was placed on a footing of perfect equality.

Unfortunately I did not profit very long by the kindness of the count and the lessons. I was taught at his house, for hardly a year had passed at the chateau when we learned of the arrest of the king at Varennes. The count and his family were in despair; and child as I was, I remember that I was deeply pained at the news, without knowing why, but doubtless because it is natural to share the sentiments of those with whom you live, when they treat you with as much kindness as the count and countess had treated me. However, I continued to enjoy the happy freedom from care natural to youth, till one morning I was awakened by a loud noise, and was immediately surrounded by a great number of people, none of whom I knew, and who asked me countless questions which I could not answer. I then learned that the count and his family had emigrated. I was carried to

the town hall, where the same questions were renewed, with the same fruitless result; for I knew nothing of the intentions of my late protectors, and could only reply by a flood of tears when I saw myself abandoned and left to my own resources, at a great distance from my family.

I was too young then to reflect on the conduct of the count; but I have since thought that his abandonment of me was an act of delicacy on his part, as he did not wish to make me an emigre without the consent of my parents. I have always believed that, before his departure, the count had committed me to the care of some one, who subsequently did not dare to claim me, lest he should compromise himself, which was then, as is well known, exceedingly dangerous. Behold me, then, at twelve years of age, left without a guide, without means of support, without any one to advise me, and without money, more than a hundred leagues from my home, and already accustomed to the comforts of a luxurious life. It is hardly credible that in this state of affairs I was regarded almost as a suspect, and was required each day to present myself before the city authorities for the greater safety of the Republic. I remember well that whenever the Emperor was pleased to make me relate these tribulations of my childhood, he never failed to repeat several times, "the fools," referring to these same city authorities. However that may be, the authorities of Tours, coming to the conclusion, at last, that a child of twelve was incapable of overthrowing the Republic, gave me a passport, with the injunction to leave the city within twenty-four hours, which I proceeded to do with a hearty good-will, but not without deep grief also at seeing myself alone, and on foot, with a long journey before me. After much privation and many hardships I arrived at last in the neighborhood of Saint-Amand, which I found in the possession of the Austrians, and that it was impossible for me to reach the town, as the French surrounded it. In my despair I seated myself on the side of a ditch and was weeping bitterly, when I was noticed by the chief of squadron, Michau,

[I afterwards had the happiness of obtaining for him, from the Emperor, a position he wished, as a place of retirement, having lost the use of his right arm.—CONSTANT.]

who afterwards became colonel and aide-de-camp to General Loison. Michau approached me, questioned me with great interest, and made me relate my sad adventures, which touched him deeply,

while he did not conceal his inability to send me back to my family. He had just obtained leave of absence, which he was going to spend with his family at Chinon, and proposed to me to accompany him, which invitation I accepted with gratitude. I cannot say too much of the kindness and consideration shown me by his household during the three or four months I spent with them. At the end of that time he took me to Paris, where I was soon after placed in the house of M. Gobert, a rich merchant, who treated me with the greatest, kindness.

I lately visited M. Gobert; and he recalled to me that, when we traveled together, he gave up to me one of the seats of his carriage, upon which I was permitted to stretch myself out and sleep. I mention this circumstance, otherwise unimportant, to show the kindness he always showed me.

Some years later I made the acquaintance of Carrat, who was in the service of Madame Bonaparte while the general was absent on the Egyptian expedition. Before relating how I came to enter her household, it is proper to mention how Carrat himself came into her service, and at the same time narrate some anecdotes in regard to him, which will show what were the pastimes of the inhabitants of Malmaison at that date.

Carrat happened to be at Plombieres when Madame Bonaparte

[Madame Bonaparte, nee Marie Joseph Rose Tascher de la Pagerie, was born in Martinique, 1763; became the widow of Viscount Alexander de Beauharnais, 1794; married Napoleon Bonaparte March, 1796; became Empress May 18, 1804; was divorced Dec. 16, 1809; died at Malmaison, May 20, 1814.—TRANS.]

went there to take the waters. Every day he brought her bouquets, and addressed to her little complimentary speeches, so singular and so droll, that Josephine was much diverted, as were also the ladies who accompanied her, among whom were Mesdames de Cambis and de Criguy, and especially her own daughter Hortense, who was convulsed at his oddities. The truth is, he was exceedingly amusing, by reason of a certain simplicity and originality of character, which, however, did not prevent him from being a person of intelligence; and his eccentricities did not displease Madame Bonaparte. A sentimental scene took place when this excellent lady left the springs. Carrat wept, bemoaned himself, and expressed his lasting grief at not being able to see Madame Bonaparte daily, as he had been accustomed; and Madame Bonaparte was so kind-hearted that she at once

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