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Содержание

SIR WALTER SCOTT'S LIFE OF NAPOLEON BONAPARTE	5
(Continued from page 5.)	5
THE DEATH OF ROBESPIERRE	6
BIRTH OF BONAPARTE	8
NAPOLEON'S EARLY LIFE	9
Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.	11

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SIR WALTER SCOTT'S LIFE
OF NAPOLEON BONAPARTE

(Continued from page 5.)

Robespierre was a coward, who signed death-warrants with a hand that shook, though his heart was relentless. He possessed no passions on which to charge his crimes; they were perpetrated in cold blood, and upon mature deliberation.

Marat, the third of this infernal triumvirate, had attracted the attention of the lower orders, by the violence of his sentiments in the journal which he conducted from the commencement of the revolution, upon such principles that it took the lead in forwarding its successive changes. His political exhortations began and ended like the howl of a blood-hound for murder; or, if a wolf could have written a journal, the gaunt and famished wretch could not have ravened more eagerly for slaughter. It was blood which was Marat's constant demand, not in drops from the breast of an individual, not in puny streams from the slaughter of families, but blood in the profusion of an ocean. His usual calculation of the heads which he demanded amounted to two hundred and sixty thousand; and though he sometimes raised it as high as three hundred thousand, it never fell beneath the smaller number. It may be hoped, and for the honour of human nature we are inclined to believe, there was a touch of insanity in this unnatural strain of ferocity; and the wild and squalid features of the wretch appear to have intimated a degree of alienation of mind. Marat was, like Robespierre, a coward. Repeatedly denounced in the assembly, he skulked instead of defending himself, and lay concealed in some obscure garret or cellar among his cut-throats, until a storm appeared, when, like a bird of ill omen, his death-screach was again heard. Such was the strange and fatal triumvirate, in which the same degree of cannibal cruelty existed under different aspects. Danton murdered to glut his rage; Robespierre to avenge his injured vanity, or to remove a rival whom he envied; Marat, from the same instinctive love of blood, which induces a wolf to continue his ravage of the flocks long after his hunger is appeased.

Passing by the horrors of the reign of terror, we shall close the second volume with a vivid and powerful picture, which we cannot refrain quoting—

THE DEATH OF ROBESPIERRE

Meantime the convention continued to maintain the bold and commanding front which they had so suddenly and critically assumed. Upon learning the escape of the arrested deputies, and hearing of the insurrection at the Hotel de Ville, they instantly passed a decree outlawing Robespierre and his associates, inflicting a similar doom upon the mayor of Paris, the procureur and other members of the commune, and charging twelve of their members, the boldest who could be selected, to proceed with the armed force to the execution of the sentence. The drums of the National Guards now beat to arms in all the sections under authority of the convention, while the tocsin continued to summon assistance with its iron voice to Robespierre and the civic magistrates. Every thing appeared to threaten a violent catastrophe, until it was seen clearly that the public voice, and especially amongst the National Guards, was declaring itself generally against the Terrorists.

The Hotel de Ville was surrounded by about fifteen hundred men, and cannon turned upon the doors. The force of the assailants was weakest in point of number, but their leaders were men of spirit, and night concealed their inferiority of force.

The deputies commissioned for the purpose read the decree of the assembly to those whom they found assembled in front of the city-hall, and they shrunk from the attempt of defending it, some joining the assailants, others laying down their arms and dispersing. Meantime the deserted group of Terrorists within conducted themselves like scorpions, which, when surrounded by a circle of fire, are said to turn their stings on each other, and on themselves. Mutual and ferocious upbraiding took place among these miserable men. "Wretch, were these the means you promised to furnish?" said Payan to Henriot, whom he found intoxicated and incapable of resolution or exertion; and seizing on him as he spoke, he precipitated the revolutionary general from a window. Henriot survived the fall only to drag himself into a drain, in which he was afterwards discovered and brought out to execution. The younger Robespierre threw himself from the window, but had not the good fortune to perish on the spot. It seemed as if even the melancholy fate of suicide, the last refuge of guilt and despair, was denied to men who had so long refused every species of mercy to their fellow-creatures. Le Bas alone had calmness enough to despatch himself with a pistol-shot. Saint Just, after imploring his comrades to kill him, attempted his own life with an irresolute hand, and failed, Couthon lay beneath the table brandishing a knife, with which he repeatedly wounded his bosom, without daring to add force enough to reach his heart. Their chief, Robespierre, in an unsuccessful attempt to shoot himself, had only inflicted a horrible fracture on his under-jaw.

In this situation they were found like wolves in their lair, foul with blood, mutilated, despairing, and yet not able to die. Robespierre lay on a table in an anti-room, his head supported by a deal-box, and his hideous countenance half-hidden by a bloody and dirty cloth bound round the shattered chin.¹

The captives were carried in triumph to the convention, who, without admitting them to the bar, ordered them, as outlaws, for instant execution. As the fatal cars passed to the guillotine, those who filled them, but especially Robespierre, were overwhelmed with execrations from the friends and relatives of victims whom he had sent on the same melancholy road. The nature of his previous wound, from which the cloth had never been removed till the executioner tore it off, added to the torture of the sufferer. The shattered jaw dropped, and the wretch yelled aloud, to the horror of the spectators.² A mask taken from that dreadful head was long exhibited in different nations of Europe,

¹ It did not escape the minute observers of this scene, that he still held in his hand the bag which had contained the fatal pistol, and which was inscribed with the words, *Au grand monarque*, alluding to the sign, doubtless, of the gunsmith who sold the weapon, but singularly applicable to the high pretensions of the purchaser.

² The fate of no tyrant in history was so hideous at the conclusion, excepting perhaps that of Jugurtha.

and appalled the spectator by its ugliness, and the mixture of fiendish expression with that of bodily agony.

Thus fell Maximilian Robespierre, after having been the first person in the French republic for nearly two years, during which time he governed it upon the principles of Nero or Caligula. His elevation to the situation which he held involved more contradictions than perhaps attach to any similar event in history. A low-born and low-minded tyrant was permitted to rule with the rod of the most frightful despotism a people, whose anxiety for liberty had shortly before rendered them unable to endure the rule of a humane and lawful sovereign. A dastardly coward arose to the command of one of the bravest nations in the world; and it was under the auspices of a man who dared scarce fire a pistol, that the greatest generals in France began their careers of conquest. He had neither eloquence nor imagination; but substituted in their stead a miserable, affected, bombastic style, which, until other circumstances gave him consequence, drew on him general ridicule. Yet against so poor an orator, all the eloquence of the philosophical Girondists, all the terrible powers of his associate Danton, employed in a popular assembly, could not enable them to make an effectual resistance. It may seem trifling to mention, that in a nation where a good deal of prepossession is excited by amiable manners and beauty of external appearance, the person who ascended to the highest power was not only ill-looking, but singularly mean in person, awkward and constrained in his address, ignorant how to set about pleasing even when he most desired to give pleasure, and as tiresome nearly as he was odious and heartless.

To compensate all these deficiencies, Robespierre had but an insatiable ambition, founded on a vanity which made him think himself capable of filling the highest situation; and therefore gave him daring, when to dare is frequently to achieve. He mixed a false and over-strained, but rather fluent species of bombastic composition, with the grossest flattery to the lowest classes of the people; in consideration of which, they could not but receive as genuine the praises which he always bestowed on himself. His prudent resolution to be satisfied with possessing the essence of power, without seeming to desire its rank and trappings, formed another art of cajoling the multitude. His watchful envy, his long-protracted but sure revenge, his craft, which to vulgar minds supplies the place of wisdom, were his only means of competing with his distinguished antagonists. And it seems to have been a merited punishment of the extravagances and abuses of the French revolution, that it engaged the country in a state of anarchy which permitted a wretch such as we have described, to be for a long period master of her destiny. Blood was his element, like that of the other Terrorists, and he never fastened with so much pleasure on a new victim, as when he was at the same time an ancient associate. In an epitaph, of which the following couplet may serve as a translation, his life was represented as incompatible with the existence of the human race:—

"Here lies Robespierre—let no tear be shed;
Reader, if he had lived, thou hadst been dead."

The commencement of the third volume introduces us to the family of Bonaparte, who resided in the island of Corsica, which was, in ancient times, remarkable as the scene of Seneca's exile, and in the last century was distinguished by the memorable stand which the natives made in defence of their liberties against the Genoese and French, during a war which tended to show the high and indomitable spirit of the islanders, united as it is with the fiery and vindictive feelings proper to their country and climate.

BIRTH OF BONAPARTE

Charles Bonaparte, the father of Napoleon, died at the age of about forty years, of an ulcer in the stomach, on the 24th of February, 1785. His celebrated son fell a victim to the same disease. During Napoleon's grandeur, the community of Montpellier expressed a desire to erect a monument to the memory of Charles Bonaparte. His answer was both sensible and in good taste. "Had I lost my father yesterday," he said, "it would be natural to pay his memory some mark of respect consistent with my present situation. But it is twenty years since the event, and it is one in which the public can take no concern. Let us leave the dead in peace."

The subject of our narrative was born, according to the best accounts, and his own belief, upon the 15th day of August, 1769, at his father's house in Ajaccio, forming one side of a court which leads out of the Rue Charles.³ We read with interest, that his mother's good constitution, and bold character of mind, having induced her to attend mass upon the day of his birth, (being the Festival of the Assumption,) she was obliged to return home immediately, and as there was no time to prepare a bed or bedroom, she was delivered of the future victor upon a temporary couch prepared for her accommodation, and covered with an ancient piece of tapestry, representing the heroes of the Iliad. The infant was christened by the name of Napoleon, an obscure saint, who had dropped to leeward, and fallen altogether out of the calendar, so that his namesake never knew which day he was to celebrate as the festival of his patron. When questioned, on this subject by the bishop who confirmed him, he answered smartly, that there were a great many saints, and only three hundred and sixty-five days to divide amongst them. The politeness of the pope promoted the patron in order to compliment the god-child, and Saint Napoleon des Ursins was accommodated with a festival. To render this compliment, which no one but a pope could have paid, still more flattering, the feast of Saint Napoleon was fixed for the fifteenth August, the birthday of the emperor, and the day on which he signed the Concordat. So that Napoleon had the rare honour of promoting his patron saint.

³ Benson's "Sketches of Corsica," p. 4.

NAPOLEON'S EARLY LIFE

The young Napoleon had, of course, the simple and hardy education proper to the natives of the mountainous island of his birth, and in his infancy was not remarkable for more than that animation of temper, and wilfulness and impatience of inactivity, by which children of quick parts and lively sensibility are usually distinguished. The winter of the year was generally passed by the family of his father at Ajaccio, where they still preserve and exhibit, as the ominous play-thing of Napoleon's boyhood, the model of a brass cannon, weighing about thirty pounds.⁴ We leave it to philosophers to inquire, whether the future love of war was suggested by the accidental possession of such a toy; or whether the tendency of the mind dictated the selection of it; or, lastly, whether the nature of the pastime, corresponding with the taste which chose it, may not have had each their action and reaction, and contributed between them to the formation of a character so warlike.

The same traveller who furnishes the above anecdote, gives an interesting account of the country retreat of the family of Bonaparte during the summer.

Going along the sea-shore from Ajaccio towards the Isle Sanguiniere, about a mile from the town, occur two stone pillars, the remains of a doorway, leading up to a dilapidated villa, once the residence of Madame Bonaparte's half-brother on the mother's side, whom Napoleon created Cardinal Fesch.⁵ The house is approached by an avenue, surrounded and overhung by the cactus and other shrubs, which luxuriate in a warm climate. It has a garden and a lawn, showing amidst neglect vestiges of their former beauty, and the house is surrounded by shrubberies, permitted to run to wilderness. This was the summer residence of Madame Bonaparte and her family. Almost enclosed by the wild olive, the cactus, the clematis, and the almond-tree, is a very singular and isolated granite rock, called Napoleon's grotto, which seems to have resisted the decomposition which has taken place around. The remains of a small summer-house are visible beneath the rock, the entrance to which is nearly closed by a luxuriant fig-tree. This was Bonaparte's frequent retreat, when the vacations of the school at which he studied permitted him to visit home. How the imagination labours to form an idea of the visions, which, in this sequestered and romantic spot, must have arisen before the eyes of the future hero of a hundred battles!

Bonaparte's ardour for the abstract sciences amounted to a passion, and was combined with a singular aptitude for applying them to the purposes of war, while his attention to pursuits so interesting and exhaustless in themselves, was stimulated by his natural ambition and desire of distinction. Almost all the scientific teachers at Brienne, being accustomed to study the character of their pupils, and obliged by their duty to make memoranda and occasional reports on the subject, spoke of the talents of Bonaparte, and the progress of his studies, with admiration. Circumstances of various kinds, exaggerated or invented, have been circulated concerning the youth of a person so remarkable. The following are given upon good authority.⁶

The conduct of Napoleon among his companions was that of a studious and reserved youth, addicting himself deeply to the means of improvement, and rather avoiding than seeking the usual temptations to dissipation of time. He had few friends, and no intimates; yet at different times, when he chose to exert it, he exhibited considerable influence over his fellow-students, and when there was any joint plan to be carried into effect, he was frequently chosen dictator of the little republic.

⁴ "Sketches of Corsica," p. 4.

⁵ The mother of Letitia Ramolini, wife of Carlo Bonaparte, married a Swiss officer in the French service, named Fesch, after the death of Letitia's father.

⁶ They were many years since communicated to the author by Messrs. Joseph and Louis Law, brothers of General Baron Lauriston, Bonaparte's favourite aid-de-camp. These gentlemen, or at least Joseph, were educated at Brienne, but at a later period than Napoleon. Their distinguished brother was his contemporary.

In the time of winter, Bonaparte, upon one occasion, engaged his companions in constructing a fortress out of the snow, regularly defended by ditches and bastions, according to the rules of fortification. It was considered as displaying the great powers of the juvenile engineer in the way of his profession, and was attacked and defended by the students, who divided into parties for the purpose, until the battle became so keen that their superiors thought it proper to proclaim a truce.

The young Bonaparte gave another instance of address and enterprise upon the following occasion. There was a fair held annually in the neighbourhood of Brienne, where the pupils of the Military School used to find a day's amusement; but on account of a quarrel betwixt them and the country people upon a former occasion, or for some such cause, the masters of the institution had directed that the students should not on the fair-day be permitted to go beyond their own precincts, which were surrounded with a wall. Under the direction of the young Corsican, however, the scholars had already laid a plot for securing their usual day's diversion. They had undermined the wall which encompassed their exercising ground, with so much skill and secrecy, that their operations remained entirely unknown till the morning of the fair, when a part of the boundary unexpectedly fell, and gave a free passage to the imprisoned students, of which they immediately took the advantage, by hurrying to the prohibited scene of amusement.

But although on these, and perhaps other occasions, Bonaparte displayed some of the frolic temper of youth, mixed with the inventive genius and the talent for commanding others by which he was distinguished in after time, his life at school was in general that of a recluse and severe student, acquiring by his judgment, and treasuring in his memory, that wonderful process of almost unlimited combination, by means of which he was afterwards able to simplify the most difficult and complicated undertakings. His mathematical teacher was proud of the young islander, as the boast of his school, and his other scientific instructors had the same reason to be satisfied.

In languages Bonaparte was less a proficient, and never acquired the art of writing or spelling French, far less foreign languages, with accuracy or correctness; nor had the monks of Brienne any reason to pride themselves on the classical proficiency of their scholar. The full energies of his mind being devoted to the scientific pursuits of his profession, left little time or inclination for other studies.

Though of Italian origin, Bonaparte had not a decided taste for the fine arts, and his taste in composition seems to have leaned towards the grotesque and the bombastic. He used always the most exaggerated phrases; and it is seldom, if ever, that his bulletins present those touches of sublimity which are founded on dignity and simplicity of expression.

Notwithstanding the external calmness and reserve of his deportment, he who was destined for such great things had, while yet a student at Brienne, a full share of that ambition for distinction and dread of disgrace, that restless and irritating love of fame, which is the spur to extraordinary attempts. Sparkles of this keen temper sometimes showed themselves. On one occasion, a harsh superintendent imposed on the future emperor, for some trifling fault, the disgrace of wearing a penitential dress, and being excluded from the table of the students, and obliged to eat his meal apart. His pride felt the indignity so severely, that it brought on a severe nervous attack; to which, though otherwise of good constitution, he was subject upon occasions of extraordinary irritation. Father Petrault, the professor of mathematics, hastened to deliver his favourite pupil from the punishment by which he was so much affected.

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