

PERSONAL MEMORIES OF NAPOLEON

BY BARON DE TRÉMONT

[The following reminiscences of Napoleon were written by the Baron de Trémont, whose interesting account of a visit to Beethoven was published in our issue of February 19.]

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ANY incident, no matter how trivial it may be, is worth observing if it adds to our knowledge of a great man. Henry IV used to play horse on all-fours with his children on his back. The conqueror of Italy, when he lived in his little house in *rue de la Victoire*, allowed his wife to let her dogs sleep on their bed, and used personally to take them for an airing in the morning.

He was tolerant of contradiction from people in whom he had confidence. He even invited it. You could get the better of him in argument without arousing his resentment or ill-humor. One day he said to Monge: 'Your boys at the Polytechnic School find it hard to understand the Empire?'

'Sire, they understood the Republic; then suddenly we had the Consulate, which was still something like a republic; now here we have the Empire. Give them time. You must admit that you do things rather abruptly.'

Napoleon smiled and turned the conversation.

In the Council of State and in private life he was far from talkative. He was the one who listened best, and he never tried to dominate the discussion. However, he would summarize it with marvelous lucidity in making his decisions.

His patience with his friends verged upon weakness. Men whom he liked could be almost ill-mannered toward him. Although he was a profound and

untiring student of human nature, he was the frequent victim of ingratitude and betrayal, which his noble heart did not foresee. Witness Fouche, Talleyrand, and others.

When his reverses came, he should have retired his old lieutenants and put in their places young officers trained under his own eyes and not sated with honors and high fortune. But he trusted to their gratitude and devotion, and he would not believe that men who had risen shoulder to shoulder with himself would shirk in time of danger.

I was named auditor of the Council of State in 1808. At that time the number of these officials was small. They were selected directly by the Emperor, they all worked at the Council offices, and attended its sessions, at which he presided. . . . Since I had previously been in military service, I was detailed to the War Section. The Emperor often presided over the Council when in Paris. Unless one knows the details of these memorable sessions, he can not appreciate fully Napoleon's genius. In reading the reports of these meetings you lose the vivid interest which his presence and his words produced. The War Section was separated from him only by a little table, occupied by the vice-grand elector, Talleyrand. So during the sessions, which lasted sometimes six hours, the Emperor was constantly under my observation. His

eyes, which were always roving about, would now and then dwell for a moment involuntarily on those near him, so that my face gradually became familiar. His noble countenance, so beautiful and so calm, inspired confidence instead of dread. This was a great help for me; for I was very young, my services had been of no special importance, and my only title to consideration was that all the members of my family had served the state, and my father, a general officer, had died of his wounds. I had no great patrons, no powerful influence behind me, and was with good reason grateful for my appointment, and anxious to justify it by my industry.

General Lacuée, president of the Polytechnic School and a cabinet officer, presided over the War Section. He was a stern man, a tremendous worker, and loved men who worked hard. He kept me more than busy.

The Emperor left for the campaign of 1809. A little later General Lacuée told me at a Council meeting to report at his house early the following morning. I was there promptly as ordered.

'My dear sir,' he said, 'just as he was leaving, the Emperor commissioned Count Joubert, Béranger and myself, to perform an important and confidential task, quite outside our functions as Councilors of State. This is a special mark of his confidence. It is a work that really requires organizing a special bureau, but we cannot do it because it is to be secret. Since we are so occupied that we cannot attend to the matter personally, we feel that we must turn it over to some industrious young man upon whose discretion we can depend and who is not afraid of hard work and difficulties. I proposed you to my colleagues, and they assented. Take these documents in a cab and get to work at once, for the Emperor is in a hurry. But bear in mind that the thing must be done well and thoroughly. When

you are ready I will call together my colleagues and you will be at the meeting.'

I was delighted, but greatly surprised when I found I had thirty-six hundred documents. They related to the receipts and expenditures of the kingdom and the army of Portugal during the three years when General Junot was governor-general and commander-in-chief there. The Emperor, who loved order and hated anything shiftless, was surprised because the Minister of War had not submitted these accounts to him, and ordered the Minister to put them into shape. There had been serious irregularities. The men guilty were close to the General and had been appointed by him. He had never kept a proper account of his own expenditures. This did not imply that he was in connivance with the others, but it was impossible to prevent his name from being tarnished by these irregularities. The Minister was perfectly aware that Napoleon's friendship for Junot went almost to the point of weakness; for he felt a deep personal affection for him. Junot had been his aide-de-camp at the siege of Toulon; he had not deserted him during his rebuffs in Paris, when he was a poor and solitary man. In those days the aide-de-camp, who was the son of a prosperous farmer of the Côte-d'Or, had shared his purse with his General. Gratitude is a rare sentiment, but one to which Napoleon was always accessible.

So the Minister of War had made his report to suit the circumstances. Every one knows how figures can be juggled with to conceal facts. The Emperor could not discover just what they meant. Whether he suspected the motive or not, he at once summoned the Minister of Finance. The same obscurity prevailed there. Then he sent the documents to the Minister of the Treasury, who could not make any-

thing out of them. Was n't it a curious thing that three Ministers should have acted in precisely the same manner? At last the Emperor, determined to know what was up, appointed the confidential commission I have described.

I made a selection of the documents, examining carefully more than a thousand of them. The reports of the ministers were of no assistance to me, unless I proposed to follow the same policy which they had pursued. But my natural disposition, and still more the dictates of necessity, decided me to tell the truth precisely as it was. How otherwise could I justify the confidence placed in me? I said to myself, if the commission does not approve my report it can change it. I presented it after ten days and ten nights of continuous labor, a thing I was able to do on account of my youth and with the aid of great quantities of black coffee. The General looked surprised. 'It's all right,' he said to me, 'but I know that you are not a fool. I am going to summon my colleagues and we'll see.'

Several days passed and I was not called before them. That looked like an evil omen. Finally the General spoke to me at the Council:

'We have examined your report and have sent it to the Emperor stating that you are the author.'

I at once saw how matters stood. These gentlemen, unable to evade the issue like the three ministers, had found it convenient to make me the scapegoat. So there I was, at the outset of my career, exposed to the anger of an Emperor for a service outside of my regular duties. The china pot was colliding with the iron pot. Happily I had the resolution to await the outcome with resignation, feeling that I had done my honest duty.

Here again Napoleon showed his prodigious industry. After the first courier returned from the field, the

president of the Council called me to him at the end of the session and said:

'I have a compliment for you. The Emperor has written saying that you shall bring personally the next portfolio from the Council. You will leave for his headquarters the day after tomorrow.'

I took this as a good sign, for the Emperor would not have summoned me to him if my work had not pleased him.

I reached Vienna after the battle of Essling. [This is when he visited Beethoven.] The Emperor was at Schoenbrunn reviewing troops. All he said was this, in the presence of the Duke of Bassano:

'Mr. Auditor, you have done what three of my ministers did not dare to do. That is well. I shall not lose sight of you. Remain at my headquarters.'

We won the battles of Wagram and Znaim, and our French forces occupied Moravia. The Duke of Bassano said to me:

'The Emperor has appointed you intendant. You will keep in constant touch with Marshal Masséna, who commands the left wing of the army. It will be a difficult situation. Not only does the Marshal possess the full confidence of the Emperor, but he fancies an intendant can overcome administrative obstacles as easily as he takes redoubts. In your position the Emperor's eyes will be constantly upon you. I want to caution you for your own sake.'

The only way to get along with strong-minded men is to be calm and firm. I knew the Marshal gave excellent reports of my conduct. We had only one difference of opinion, and this is how it was settled:

The intendant-general, Count Daru, had eighty-thousand men to feed around Vienna. There were not provisions enough in the country, so he levied a heavy requisition on my province. I already had to provide for nearly sixty-

thousand there. I reported my orders to the Marshal. 'You will not obey, you know it is impossible.'

'Can I, Prince? What would you do to an officer who refused obedience? The intendant-general is my immediate superior.'

'But I am the commanding officer of my army corps, and you are hardly able to supply my troops.'

'I see only one way out of it, Marshal, and that depends on you.'

'What is it?'

'I will start my convoy as I should. You can hardly be ignorant of what I am doing. On your own authority, you will send a detachment of cavalry to turn it back and conduct it to the military storehouse. If you consider it advisable you will inform the Emperor what you have been compelled to do. I will make my report to the intendant-general and shall have done my duty.'

The prince shook my hand cordially, adopted my suggestion, and things stopped there.

The Treaty of Vienna restored Moravia to Austria, and gave France the Illyrian provinces. The Emperor appointed me intendant of Croatia. That part of the province on the right of the river Save, which was retained by Austria, held the old capital. This was very embarrassing for me. Another difficulty was that I had to deal with my people in five different languages: in Latin with the local authorities of the Hungarian districts; in Italian with the people on the coast; in German with the middle classes; in Croat with the peasants and common people; and, finally, in French with my superiors, the army administration, and my French employees. It was a real Babel, and the only province where these conditions prevailed.

[Baron de Trémont describes some of the difficulties of his administration in

Croatia, and of his subsequent negotiations at Agram with the representatives of Austria at the order of Napoleon.]

While I was at the negotiations at Agram I received my appointment as Prefect of Aveyron, with instructions to report as soon as I had terminated my present duties. So the Emperor had kept his word, 'I shall not lose sight of you,' in spite of my obscurity and remoteness.

I arrived at Paris the night the King of Rome was born, and discovered I was the only auditor who had ever been appointed a prefect before having served as Councilor of State. In delivering me his instructions the Emperor said:

'You see I have not forgotten you. The conscription is going very badly. Find out what the trouble is and restore order there.'

In fact, of an annual levy of six or seven hundred men, scarcely a hundred were serving with the colors. My future department had more than four thousand slackers, most of whom had escaped to Spain where they found work and it was impossible to get at them. A flying column of recruiters was oppressing their families and had become a disgrace to the department.

In order to cure the evil at its source I had to seek a new remedy. I begged the director-general of conscription to let me follow my own devices and take full responsibility. He granted my request. I abolished the press gangs, and proclaimed an amnesty for all old deserters. Then, emphasizing the mercy which had been shown them for their past misdeeds, I announced that in future I should enforce the law strictly, but with justice. I was successful. In the levy for 1811 there were only thirty-two deserters; in that for 1812 only five.

But the consequences of the tragic campaign in Russia were overwhelming France. Demands for men became in-

cessant. After having drafted two years ahead of the legal age, the classes who had already completed their service were called back to arms. We even had to take men exempted for cause. I thought this last order harmful for the service of the Emperor, at least in my own department. I did not want to take away the youth who was the sole support of an aged parent, of a widow or an orphan. I did not hesitate to act on my own responsibility in such cases and the results justified my policy.

An imperial decree was issued to organize the *gardes d'honneur*. Our cavalry was almost annihilated. It was hoped in this manner to get ten thousand picked men. The instructions to us prefects were to designate members of the *gardes d'honneur* and to tax their families arbitrarily for the cost of their mounts and equipment. Probably the Emperor, carried along by the fatal rush of events, had not properly studied the details of a measure sure to prove so odious and arbitrary. I chose to risk the loss of my position rather than to incur the reproach of the families who might charge me with personally designating their children for slaughter.

The only other prefect, in all the twenty-six departments which then comprised the Empire, who felt as strongly as I did, was Comte de Vaublanc, of Moselle. Although I could not obey the orders as given I did not relax my efforts. I had a list made of the men who would be eligible for service in the *gardes d'honneur* in the five *arrondissements* of my department. I left them to agree among themselves who should go, accepting only those who were able and willing. In four of the *arrondissements* the men arranged the matter among themselves. In the other I had the choice made by lot. In this way I got together young men really devoted to the cause, and in fact five more than the number sent. In-

stead of taxing the cost of their mounts and equipment arbitrarily, I levied it in accordance with the regular assessment roll.

The Minister of War, when he found what I had done, reproved me sternly, and wrote that I must report the matter to the Emperor. My reply was:

'Up to the present His Majesty has had enough confidence in me to leave me freedom of action in serving him in the department I administer. If in the present instance my contingent is less brave and less fit physically than the others, I have done wrong; but if it fulfills all the requirements, I count on the intelligence of the Emperor, to whom I have sent seven more men than he asked, two of them mounted and equipped at my personal expense, to recognize my personal loyalty.'

The Emperor must have approved my act, for I never heard anything but compliments for my contingent.

With our defeat came the abdication at Fontainebleau. I believed it was impossible for Louis XVIII to keep the promises made in his declaration at Saint-Ouen, and to leave the Emperor's prefects in charge of the departments. I remained only long enough to see that the new sovereign's authority was established, and, impressing upon the people in my care how much peace would mean to them after their recent sufferings, I resigned.

Now I come to the One Hundred Days. Though the Emperor's return was a miracle, I did not believe it would be permanently successful, and I did not present myself at the Tuileries. I thought he had forgotten me, and I congratulated myself on that fact. Let the following incident show how his mind retained everything, and how lofty and generous were his sentiments.

The day after he arrived at Paris he summoned, in regard to a military mat-

ter, one of my cousins and friends, a colonel of the engineers. He was at dinner at the time, with a single companion, Count Regnault.

'I'll be with you in a moment,' he said to the colonel. He then showed the Count a printed paper. It was my proclamation to the people of Aveyron. Freed from my oath of loyalty by the Emperor's abdication, I had said to them as their prefect, and still more as a French citizen, that the termination of the war would be a blessing in itself. Napoleon, whose marvelous mind grasped the minutest details, quickly caught up even in the confusion of his return from Elba, the last official acts of the men who had served him and who, he thought, would serve him again.

'See, Count, how he taught me a lesson!'

The Count glanced it through and thought the Emperor was angry. 'Intolerable! A mere auditor of no personal standing, whom Your Majesty had the generosity to elevate beyond his merits! What ingratitude! Surely Your Majesty will do nothing for him!'

'I am going to give him the prefecture of Ardennes!'

'What, Sire, a frontier department, which will be a most critical point if war becomes inevitable!'

'It is precisely that which decides me. I have put this man to the test

many times, and if he accepts I am sure he will serve me well.'

When he left the Tuileries my cousin hastened to tell me what he had chanced to overhear. My nomination came soon afterwards. I would not have accepted a department in the interior, but it would have been most ungrateful not to reply by my loyalty to so great a mark of confidence. I was deeply touched by the nobility of Napoleon's character, which permitted no trace of self-pride to obscure its view of truth. Louis XVIII in his place would have shown me the door.

So I reported to the Emperor, who merely said:

'Leave at once. I count on you.'

During the short, sad struggle which followed, I had the honor of being twice mentioned in the orders of the day.

I trust I may be pardoned for these personal details concerning one of the more humble servants of the Emperor. But the fact that I am a man of such modest position only emphasizes the tremendous grasp of that great commander, whom not the slightest detail escaped. It illustrates even more the generosity of his sentiments, how far above petty considerations and motives he was; how he had an eye only for loyal service, and never permitted his trust and favor to be shaken by the frankness and the independence of his agents.

NAPOLEON: A SOCIALIST ESTIMATE

BY K. L.

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AT six o'clock on the evening of May 5, 1821, just as the sunset gun was sounding from the Fort of St. Helena, Napoleon sighed and breathed his last. A cancer of the stomach, the illness which had taken his father, struck the British shackles from the limbs of the chained Titan, who had worn them only four years less than his imperial title. His enemies in Europe, the Bourbons and the monarchs of the Holy Alliance who, six years before, had turned pale at the news of his return from Elba, received the tidings of his death with relief. In the safe and sane Europe of the restoration, there was no room for Napoleon's glory or Napoleon's empire. His fleeting shade sought asylum in a new realm — the realm of eternal fame. Indeed, even while the former master of the world was still a helpless prisoner in the tiny cliff-bound island, exposed to the petty persecutions of Hudson Lowe, popular song and story, myth and legend, and the genius of great poets were already weaving about his person the halo of a superman. When his physician, Antomarchi, verified that the pulse of the prematurely aged, over-corpulent little Corsican had stopped forever, a mortal ceased to live and a demigod was born.

Never did a human life or life-work bid more insistently for apotheosis. Summon the greatest military heroes of all ages, your Hannibals, Alexanders, Cæsars, and Friedrichs, and the golden eagle of the Emperor overtops them all, — soars high above the fame of Cannæ, Issos, Pharsalæ, and Leuthen.

When the great Punic general drank poison to escape the cruel vengeance of the Romans; when Cæsar sank under the daggers of conspirators, that was a personal tragedy; when relentless destiny harried Napoleon from the Kremlin to Leipzig, to Waterloo, and to his island prison, the fall of a man was the symbol for the fall of a world, of a world which he had personally created in fifteen short years. Did any fairy godmother whisper into the ears of the little Italian, whose first overmastering passion as a child was hatred of Corsica's French conquerors, against whom Paoli was then fighting his hopeless fight of freedom, that he would one day be the national hero of France? What promise was there in the student at Brienne, whose Italian name was mocked by his comrades; in the lieutenant at Auxonne who lodged in an attic with two chairs and a rickety table covered with books and could find no publisher for his *History of Corsica*; in the young general of the Revolution, with threadbare provincial clothes, touching the pity of the ladies of Paris — had not his 'gloomy staring Italian gaze' dazzled them — what promise was there in these sordid beginnings of the man who ten years later was to dwell indifferently in the Tuileries, in Schönbrunn, and in the Escorial, and who was to bid that Talma play at Erfurt before stalls filled with kings, servile crowned puppets of his mighty bidding? In 1794, Aubrey, chairman of the war committee of the Jacobins, shouted at him