

**MEMOIRS OF LUCIEN
BONAPARTE (PRINCE
OF CANINO), PART
THE FIRST, PP. 8-176**

Published @ 2017 Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd

ISBN 9780649646654

Memoirs of Lucien Bonaparte (Prince of Canino), Part the First, pp. 8-176 by Lucien Bonaparte

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Edited by Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd.

Cover @ 2017

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LUCIEN BONAPARTE

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INTRODUCTION.

SINCE the consular republic, under all governments, the pamphleteers have too often made me the subject of their leisure. Revelations, secret memoirs, collections of anecdotes, the fruits of imaginations without shame or decency, have not spared me. I have read all of them in my retirement, and I was at first surprised how I could have drawn upon myself so many calumnies, never having offended any person. But my astonishment ceased when I had better appreciated my position: removed from public affairs, without influence, and almost always in silent or open opposition to the powers, though sufficiently near to keep them constantly in fear of my return to favour, how was it possible for the malice of the courtiers to leave me in repose? And since the downfall of my family, they have thought, without doubt, that it would not be displeasing to the ruling powers to continue their *noble work* of calumny. I resigned myself, therefore, to what appeared to be the natural effect of a position that I had chosen for myself, or had been imposed upon me; and I have left the field open to those brave gentry who delight in oppressing the proscribed. I have found in my conscience, with which Providence has blessed me, sufficient to console me for every injustice. It is not, therefore, for a personal end that I have resolved to publish these memoirs; I do it because they appear to offer materials of some value to a history so fruitful in great events, of which the serious study may be useful in future to my country. Public opinion will inform me if I have deceived myself; and in that case, this first part of my memoirs will be all that I shall allow myself to publish.

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MEMOIRS
OF
LUCIEN BONAPARTE,
(PRINCE OF CANINO.)

WRITTEN BY HIMSELF.

TRANSLATED FROM THE ORIGINAL MANUSCRIPT, UNDER THE
IMMEDIATE SUPERINTENDENCE OF THE AUTHOR.

PART THE FIRST.
(From the year 1792 to the year 8 of the Republic.)

©

NEW-YORK:

PUBLISHED BY HARPER & BROTHERS,
NO. 82 CLIFF-STREET.

1836.

yet for some time that excellent uncle, and in endowing the best of mothers with that spirit of constancy and strength of soul, which the future that opened before us furnished the opportunity of giving abundant proofs in a course of wonderful prosperity, as also in that long exile which still holds us beneath its inexorable influence, and of which she had not the consolation to look forward to the termination in her dying hour. A brother, worthy of our mother, the Abbe Fesch, completed our family.

Although holding one of the first ranks in the island, in every respect our fortune was not very brilliant. Several voyages of my father to France, where he was deputy of the noblesse to Louis XVI., and the expenses of our education, superior to his means, notwithstanding the benefits he derived from government, had much impoverished our fortune.

The education of my two elder brothers upon the Continent, mine, and the deputation of our father to Paris, had rendered us entirely French. Corsica had been declared, since the 30th of November, 1789, an integral part of the monarchy; and that declaration, which had satisfied the wishes of the islanders, had completely effaced from their minds the bitter remembrance of the conquest. The philosophical ideas and revolutionary agitations which prevailed upon the Continent, fermented also in our heads; and no one hailed with more ardour than we did the dawn of 1789. Joseph entered into the administration of the department. Napoleon prepared by serious studies to march with giant steps in his career of prodigies. And the third brother, a mere boy, ran to throw himself into the popular societies, with the lively enthusiasm of a youthful and ardent mind, filled with the remembrances of college, and the great names of Rome and Greece.

I think it right to suppress all details that are foreign to public affairs: of what avail would they be! Amid the numerous recollections of my early years, I notice those only which appear to me to be useful. It was, I believe, in 1792, that a numerous fleet, commanded by the brave Admiral Truguet, left Toulon filled with troops, intended for an expedition against Sardinia. This fleet cast anchor in our beautiful bay. On the first news of their arrival the whole population of Ajaccio covered the shore. The sails pointed to the horizon shining in the brilliant rays of a cloudless sun. I flew with the swiftness of an arrow, and joining some members of a club, who, in the absence of my elder brothers, were delighted to follow me. I placed myself at their head, crying "These are our brothers!—these are the tricoloured flags!" We ran like mad creatures along the shore, as if we could have joined the fleet the sooner by going farther from the port. The music, the flags, and the reports of the guns, fired in sign of joy, contributed to increase the effect. But

while we were losing our breath, the vessels, driven by a good wind, entered the bay; perceiving too late that they had the advantage of us, we retraced our steps. In consequence of too much eagerness, we were the last to reach the fleet; but at the name of the popular society, a power at that time new and magical, all ranks gave way before us, and followed by a deputation which proclaimed me their chief, I went on board the admiral's vessel.

The troops of the expedition were composed of young Marseillaise conscripts, ill disciplined, and carrying with them into the service the agitation of the clubs. Those young men had communicated to the whole of the crew the desire of political discussion, and in every ship of war they had established a popular society. Thus, notwithstanding their courage, these troops tried the patience of the admiral, and their insubordination caused the failure of the expedition to Sardinia. No sooner were we announced, than the popular society of the admiral's vessel assembled in the grand hall of council for a public sitting. I made a speech, and the president gave me the fraternal embrace, and invited us to the honours of the sitting. This president was steward of the ship, and he harangued us for about half an hour in a manner that it was with difficulty we could preserve our gravity. I remember that he began with a voice alternately deep or piercing, and with the gestures of a maniac, "The more I see, the more I see that patriotism gains everywhere. The more I see, the more I see that the brave sans culottes are irresistible. The more I see, the more I see," &c., &c.!! and he continued thus to repeat his, "*The more I see, the more I see,*" at least twenty times, to the great amusement of his comrades and the sailors. As for us, he recalled to our minds the comedy of les Plaideurs—"When I see the sun, and when I see the moon," &c., &c. The officers of the marines, who were present at our reception, had like us the merit of not laughing aloud. We announced on our part a public sitting for the next day, destined to fraternise with the club of the admiral's vessel; and we departed amid their patriotic acclamations. This solemnity did not greatly edify our islanders; accustomed to let our chiefs speak, and those who distinguished themselves by their talents, we remarked the silence of the officers, the confusion of that clamorous multitude, and we inquired of each other if all the popular societies upon the continent were conducted in the same manner. We prepared without delay to show them our superiority the next day, and certainly it was not a very difficult affair; if the Marseillaise, previous to our sitting, had not been desirous of showing us that their actions surpassed even their eloquence.

I was occupied at my desk in preparing a speech that I was to pronounce in the course of a few hours, when I

thought I heard a distant tumult: but soon it became more distinct, and the noise of the shutting of doors every moment was overpowered by the cries of "Serra, serra." (Shut your doors, shut your doors.) The tocsin called everybody to arms. A troop of our friends were running to the house as I went out of it. We marched towards the principal place whence the noise proceeded. The streets were filled with armed men. Near the gate of the town, a woman, with dishevelled hair, was screaming "The Jacobins are assassinating my husband!" She was a Corsican married to a Frenchman, who having filled a post in the administration, was known for his aristocratic principles. It happened unfortunately that he was walking on the pier when the Marseillaise landed, and he was pointed out as an aristocrat. Instantly cries of the "aristocrats to the lantern," resounded throughout the multitude that had landed. But that cry, to which the Marseillaise were accustomed, intoxicated by their demagogic fanaticism, that cry of tigers, far from finding an echo amid the good citizens of Ajaccio, excited only their indignation and their horror; and they armed themselves in crowds to defend the victim. When I arrived upon the place it was covered by the whole population, thoroughly determined not to suffer our walls to be dishonoured by so cowardly a crime. The officers of the squadron had recalled all the Marseillaise. Seconded by our efforts, they succeeded in hurrying them on board their vessels; they appeared no more on land, and certainly we had lost all desire to fraternise with them. The fleet set sail a few days after.

This attempt at political assassination made a profound impression upon my countrymen. In our popular societies they had often denounced the anti-patriotic conversations of the agents of the ancient government; they regretted, without doubt, their lost places; but their yoke had tired us, and we beheld them with an evil eye; their long habit of commanding had not taught them to be prudent. But it had never entered into the head of any islander to kill a man without a motive of personal vengeance, and only because he had been powerful, or that his sentiments differed from ours. To put an end at once to all the embarrassment which these men from the Continent gave us, and who had so long oppressed us, and who had not learned to be silent, we resolved to send them out of the island. A vessel was prepared, and they made them embark all together. "You were not born among us," they were told; "and although we are become French, we cannot look upon those as our fellow-citizens who are the agents of a tyranny that has so long weighed us down. We have saved one of you—we have prevented violence against you; but your presence, and your dangerous discourses annoy us; we will have nothing further to do with you. Go home to your own country, and

leave us in peace." This sentiment was unanimous, the men of the *ancient regime* departed. But in a short time we regretted their departure. We learned too soon that upon their arrival on the Continent they had been all sacrificed by those of their countrymen who tried and executed them in the streets upon the revolutionary lanterns. Certainly not one among them was culpable; and had it not been for the unfortunate attempt of the troops of the expedition of the fleet, those unfortunate beings (to the number, I believe, of eight or ten) would have terminated their days in peace among us.

The deplorable end of these men, the violence of the revolutionary acts and writings upon the Continent, the attacks that were still more violent every day against religion, changed, during the year 1792, the public opinion in Corsica. Our ancient chief, the celebrated Pascal Paoli, was returned; he had only passed through Paris, and although they paid him every mark of respect that was due to so great a man, he judged with severity the chief who directed the revolution. Louis XVI. had inspired him with a profound interest. Paoli foresaw the future: he arrived in Corsica uneasy and discontented. Every political phasis increased his discontent. It was at that moment that his arrival at Ajaccio was announced to us. We had for a long time offered up prayers for his return. The enthusiasm which his name alone inspired, gave him a superior moral force over the government. He was the friend, the father, the idol of the towns and hamlets. As soon, therefore, as his arrival was promised at Ajaccio, all business ceased, nothing was thought of but his reception. The authorities, the garrison, the popular society, thought only of Paoli; their impatience to see him increased every hour.

My age gave me access only to the popular society. I thought night and day of nothing but the discourse that I should pronounce before the hero. But being rather diffident as a young man of my phrases, I had recourse to our library. After having rummaged over all the books without ceremony, I appropriated several passages that pleased me; and it was above all Bodin and Needham that I secretly put under contribution. I made choice of those civilians the least known, that I might deck myself with some of the spoils without fear of detection. I was desirous, also, to treat of some patriotic subject on the history of Corsica, with the view of leading to applications favourable to our illustrious auditor. I did not need, upon this occasion, to have recourse to foreign aid. I chose for my subject the death of the curate of Guagno, who, surrounded in the hollow of a ravine by the Genoese troops, from whom he could not escape, but upon condition of taking the oath of obedience to the tyrants of his country, preferred to die of hunger. Above twenty years

afterward I celebrated that sublime death in one of the cantos of my poem of the Cirreide, under the name of Rosol. No ancient republic offers in its history a more heroic martyrdom than that of the curate of Guagno. It exalted my imagination; I composed my speech with a palpitating heart, and I believe it possessed sufficient merit to make me regret its loss.

Thus prepared, I ran with a crowd of my countrymen to meet Paoli. He had already received my two elder brothers as the sons of a man who was dear to him, who had possessed his entire confidence, and who had served with him in the war of independence, and he welcomed me as such; his caresses intoxicated me; and I counted the moments that delayed our sitting. It opened at length; Paoli was seated in front of the tribune in an armchair, ornamented with laurels and crowns of oak. I conquered my momentary agitation, and poured forth my fragments of Needham and Bodin with confidence and warmth. I remember only that they dwelt chiefly upon the preference that the people should give to a republican government. Well chosen for the chief of our ancient republic, and adroitly joined together, those fragments of two grave civilians might well cause wonder and astonishment in the mouth of an orator of seventeen; their effect, therefore, surpassed my hopes. Paoli in embracing me called me his little Tacitus. The members of our club, who took their part in my triumph, announced then that I had got another harangue ready on the subject of the death of the curate of Guagno, and Paoli promised us a second audience. This time my success was without alloy. Our hero was affected with the cries of hatred against the Genoese which sprang forth from my subject and resounded in my passionate recital. The hatred of the Genoese, that patriotic passion of his whole life moved every fibre of his soul, and when, in my peroration, the martyred curate pronounced, with an expiring and prophetic voice, the name of Paoli, the avenger of liberty, the tears were seen to flow down the cheek of the venerable father of his country. I enjoyed with delight those tears. Paoli declared that he would take me with him, and that I should never leave him. Heroic old man!—how happy was I to follow thee to the simple residence of Rostino? How little did I then think that my stay with thee would have been of so short a duration, and that the political tempest was soon to separate us for ever?

The village of Rostino is situated in the mountains, and composed only of cottages and some small houses. Paoli inhabited a convent, where he lived with a noble simplicity. He had every day at his frugal but well-served table several guests. Every day a numerous crowd of mountaineers waited for the moment of his going out to see and speak to