

**MEMOIRS OF MADAME
DE RÉMUSAT,
1802-1808. IN
THREE VOLUMES, VOL. I**

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Memoirs of Madame de Rémusat, 1802-1808. In Three Volumes, Vol. I by Madame de Rémusat & Paul de Rémusat

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MADAME DE RÉMUSAT & PAUL DE RÉMUSAT

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MEMOIRS
OF
MADAME DE RÉMUSAT.

1802-1808.

WITH A PREFACE AND NOTES BY HER GRANDSON

PAUL DE RÉMUSAT,

SENATOR.

TRANSLATED FROM THE FRENCH BY

MRS. CASHEL HOEY AND JOHN LILLIE.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

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PREFACE.

I.

My father bequeathed to me the manuscript of the memoirs of my grandmother, who was lady-in-waiting to the Empress Josephine, accompanied by an injunction that I should publish them. He regarded those memoirs as extremely important to the history of the first portion of the present century, and had frequently contemplated publishing them himself; but he was always hindered from doing so, either by his other duties, by his many labors, or by certain scruples. He deferred the moment at which the public was to be made acquainted with these valuable reminiscences of an epoch—recent, indeed, but respecting which the present generation is so ill informed—precisely because that epoch was recent, and many persons who had been involved in its important events were still living. Although the author of these memoirs can not be accused of intentional malice, she passes judgment upon persons and things very freely. A certain consideration, which is not always consonant with the verity of history, is due, not only to the living, but to the children of the dead; the years passed on, however, and the reasons for silence diminished with the lapse of time.

About 1848 my father would perhaps have allowed this manuscript to see the light; but the empire and the Emperor returned, and then the book might have been regarded either as a piece of flattery tendered to the son of Queen Hortense, who is very gently handled by the writer, or as a direct insult, on other points, to the dynasty. Circumstances had thus given a polemic character—an aspect of actuality, as the

phrase goes—to a work which should be regarded as a candid and impartial history, the narrative of a remarkable woman, who relates with simple sincerity that which she witnessed at the court and during the reign of the Emperor, and who records her estimate of him as an individual. In any case, it is probable that the book would have been prosecuted, and its publication interdicted. I may add, lest any should consider these reasons insufficient, that my father, who was always willing that his politics, his opinions, and his personal conduct should be discussed by the critics and the press, who lived in the full glare of publicity, yet shrank with great reluctance from placing names which were dear to him before the public. That they should incur the slightest censure, that they should be uttered with any severity of tone, he dreaded extremely. He was timid when either his mother or his son was in question. His love for his mother had been the “grand passion” of his life. To her he ascribed all the happiness of his youth, every merit which he possessed, and all the success of every kind that had come to him throughout his whole existence. He derived from her his qualities alike of heart and mind; he was bound to her by the tie of close similarity of ideas, as well as by that of filial affection. Her memory, her letters, her thoughts occupied a place in his life which few suspected, for he seldom spoke of her, precisely because he was always thinking of her, and he would have feared imperfect sympathy from others in his admiration of her who was incomparable in his eyes. Who among us does not know what it is to be united by a passionate, almost fierce affection to one who is no more; ceaselessly to think of that beloved one, to question, to dream, to be always under the impression of the vanished presence—of the silent counsels; to feel that the life gone from us is mixed up with our own life, every day, not only on great occasions, and in all our actions, whether public or private; and yet, that we can not bear to speak to others of the ever-present occupant of our thoughts—no, not even to our dearest friends—and

can not even hear the dear name uttered without secret pain and disquiet? Rarely, indeed, can even the sweetness of praise lavished upon that name by a friend or a stranger avail to soothe our deep, mysterious trouble, or render it endurable.

While, however, a proper and natural sentiment dictates that memoirs should not appear until a considerable time has elapsed, it is equally desirable that their publication should not be delayed until all trace of the facts related, of the impressions made, or of the eye-witnesses of events has passed away. In order that the accuracy, or at least the sincerity of memoirs may not be disputed, each family should be in a position to substantiate them by its own recollections; and it is well that the generation which reads them should follow that which they depict. The records they contain are all the more useful because the times which they chronicle have not yet become altogether historic. This is our case at the present moment, and the great name of Napoleon is still a party battle-cry. It is interesting to introduce a new element into the strife which rages around that majestic shade. Although the epoch of the First Empire has been much discussed by the writers of memoirs, the inner life of the imperial palace has never been handled freely, and in detail; and for this good reasons have existed. The functionaries or the frequenters of the court of Napoleon I. did not care to reveal with entire unreserve the story of the time they had passed in his service. The majority, having joined the Legitimist ranks after the Restoration, were humiliated by the remembrance that they had served the usurper, especially in offices which are generally held to be ennobled only by the hereditary greatness of him who confers them; and their descendants would have been disconcerted had such manuscripts been left to them, by their authors, with the obligation of giving them to the world. It would, perhaps, be difficult to find another editor, also a grandson, who could publish such a work so willingly as I. The talent of the writer and the

utility of her book affect me much more than the difference between the opinions of my grandmother and those of her descendants. My father's life, his renown, the political creed which is his most precious bequest to me, absolve me from any necessity for explaining how and why it is that I do not necessarily adopt all the views of the author of these *Memoirs*. On the contrary, it would be easy to find in this book the first traces of that liberal spirit which animated my grandparents in the first days of the Revolution, which was transmitted to and happily developed in their son. It was almost being liberal already not to regard the principles of political liberty with hatred at the end of the last century, when so many people were ready to lay crimes which tarnished the Revolution to the charge of that liberty, and to pass judgment, notwithstanding the true admiration and the deep gratitude with which they regarded the Emperor, on the defects of his character and the evils of despotism.

Such valuable impartiality was rare indeed among the contemporaries of the great Emperor, nor have we met with it in our own time among the servants of a sovereign far less likely to dazzle those who approached him. Such a sentiment is, however, easy at the present day. Events have brought France into a state in which she is ready to receive everything with equanimity, to judge every one with equity. We have observed many changes of opinion concerning the early years of the present century. One need not have reached a very advanced stage of life to recall a time when the legend of the Empire was accepted even by the enemies of the Empire; when it might be admired with impunity; when children believed in an Emperor, who was at once a grand personage and a good fellow, somewhat like the notion of God entertained by Béranger, who indeed turned both God and Napoleon into heroes for his odes. The most determined adversaries of despotism, those who were themselves destined to undergo persecution by a new Empire, brought back to France the mortal remains of Napoleon the