

**SOUVENIRS OF A DIPLOMAT.
PRIVATE LETTERS FROM AMERICA
DURING THE ADMINISTRATION OF
PRESIDENTS VAN BUREN,
HARRISON, AND TYLER**

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Souvenirs of a Diplomat. Private Letters from America During the Administration of Presidents Van Buren, Harrison, and Tyler by Chevalier de Bacourt

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CHEVALIER DE BACOURT

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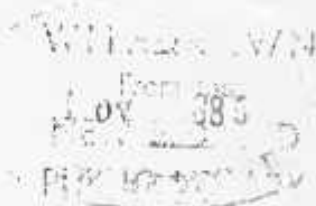
*Private Letters from America during the Administrations of
Presidents VAN BUREN, HARRISON, and TYLER*

BY
THE CHEVALIER DE BACOURT
Minister from France

WITH A MEMOIR OF THE AUTHOR

BY THE COMTESSE DE MIRABEAU

Translated from the French



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M. DE BACOURT.

I FOUND these letters on America amongst the papers of my uncle, M. de Bacourt.

When he was Minister-Plenipotentiary at Washington every packet-boat leaving for France brought accounts and criticisms of what he saw and heard day by day. Later, these letters, preserved with care, were returned to him. They describe the United States so well, such as it was forty years ago, that I have thought it my duty to publish them.

What struck me particularly in copying them was, that a republican form of government was far from offering a satisfactory result, even in that country, which had never to contend against any remembrance of monarchy, or against any party or opposition. This nation, newly born, free from all oppression

and servitude, rich and independent, seemed gloomy and discontented, inspiring one with painful feelings. While following with curiosity these people, who are forming and organizing themselves, one feels ill at ease in this vast and beautiful country, where the only passions—very contradictory ones—are the love of money and the love of liberty.

There is nothing to sympathize with, nothing to inspire confidence, nothing to admire. One sees the representatives of the nation insulting each other and fighting with fists and knives in the streets and other public places—even in the halls of Congress; the Minister of Foreign Affairs gets drunk at a dinner given by the President of the United States to the Diplomatic Corps. Their manners are entirely without refinement, and with no rules to govern them.

I think it right to mention here the personal history of the writer of these letters, whose memory is by a singular chance connected with two great historic characters—"Mirabeau and Talleyrand."

Born in 1801, he entered diplomatic life in 1822. He was Ambassador at Turin when he

sent, the day before the revolution of February, his resignation to M. de Lamartine. He did not ally himself to any government. Some he thought too near anarchy, and others too despotic. His early retirement was for him a great sacrifice, for he took a deep and constant interest in public affairs; but he would not trifle either with his convictions or with his political beliefs.

At the commencement of his career he had known at the Hague the Count de la Marck, Prince of Arenberg, to whom Mirabeau wrote on July 17, 1790:

"Here, my dear Count, are two packets, that you will give up only to me whatever happens, and in case of my death you will confide to one who will take enough interest in my memory to defend it."

The Count de la Marck replied:

"The most anxious desire to serve you will teach me to choose those who will be most worthy to serve you."

Forty years later he confided the defence "of the great tribune" to M. de Bacourt, who during his active and wandering career could not attend to it, and it was not until 1851 that

the "Correspondence of Mirabeau" appeared; in 1848 I had married the grand-nephew of Mirabeau, without my uncle, who always treated me as an adopted daughter, having in any way aided this marriage; but this singular coincidence caused him to take more to heart the commission confided to him.

The "Correspondence of Mirabeau" established clearly and precisely his sentiments and convictions. This man, who had committed only faults and was treated as a criminal, had dearly bought the right to combat those arbitrary laws of which he was the victim. He wished to put some bounds to the power without limit and without control which had caused him to pass the greater part of his life in the States' prison. Later, it is true, he tried to modify the Revolution and to establish the government on a constitutional basis, but he did not sell himself as he was accused of doing, since in trying to save the expiring monarchy he only obeyed his own convictions. He had made '89, but would have nothing to do with '93.

Pursued by his creditors, obliged to write day by day books and pamphlets to obtain

money to satisfy their demands, forced to fly from them, miserably shackled, he had neither liberty of mind nor time; and it was under these circumstances and to enter in full possession of his genius that he accepted from the court the payment of his debts.

In allowing himself to be relieved of the chains which weighed on his life he most certainly thought neither of making his fortune nor even of setting a price on his eloquence; and a letter addressed to Mademoiselle de Nehra proves conclusively his indifference to his personal interests, for in the midst of the most cruel pecuniary difficulties he answers his mistress who asks him about one of his lawsuits:

“I have other things to do than to think of all these trifles. Do you know the situation we are in? Do you know that speculation is at its height? Do you know that soon there will be not one cent in the public treasury?”

And when he wrote that, his own purse did not contain a farthing! This cry of distress is the unanswerable proof that Mirabeau had a passionate love for his country and a thorough contempt for money.