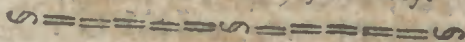


THE
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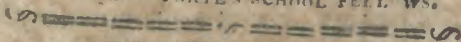
OF THE
EARLY YEARS
OF
General Bonaparte,
COMMANDER IN CHIEF
OF THE FRENCH FORCES IN THE
PRESENT WAR:

From his Birth, to his receiving the
Command of the Army of Italy.



BY
A ROYAL EMIGRANT.

ONE OF BONAPARTE'S SCHOOL FELLOWS.



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ENTERTAINING HISTORY

OF THE EARLY YEARS OF

NAPOLEONE BONAPARTE,

EMPEROR OF FRANCE.

THE following account of the early years of the Emperor BONAPARTE, is from the pen of a Noble Emigrant, who was, for some time, his school companion. It was translated by a most respectable Gentleman to whom the French author is intimately known as a man of unimpeached probity, candour, and good sense; and therefore the narrative may be considered authentic. The work from which it is extracted appeared in print some time ago, but was immediately called in after publication, for reasons which now no longer exist. It appeared in the Kelfo Mail, the editor of which says, he had it from the translator.

BONAPARTE, of a family originally Italian, was born, in the year 1769, at Calvi, a little town of Corsica, of parents noble but poor; his god-father, the celebrated Paoli, gave him at the font the name of Napoleone.— Madame de Bonaparte, his mother, (handsome, as they say), had attracted the attention of the Count de Marboëuf, named by Louis XV. to the government of Corsica; and it is to him that malice ascribes the honour of the hero's birth. Should this be true, it would give force to the world's wild opinion, which inclines to bestow on children, the offspring of unlawful love, a more decided and manly character. However that may be, the Count de Marboëuf had given many testimonies of friendship and good-will towards the family of Bonaparte; and had particularly taken on himself the care of the young man, whom he had a long time assisted with his credit and his purse. In 1778, the Count had designed to send his young Protege to France, with the view of giving him an education suitable to his birth, and necessary to his future establishment.

France, under the ancient government, and, more particularly, under the reign of Louis XV. and of Louis XVI. had formed establishments for the education of gentlemen of small fortune; and the magnificence of the Kings had spared nothing to render them, at the same time, useful and agreeable

to young men. These institutions, called *Ecoles Royales Militaires*, were to the number of thirteen, and established in different provinces of the kingdom; that of Paris served as a centre to the whole; and was the object to which the young men, admitted by the King, directed their views. It was held up as a recompence to those who most distinguished themselves by their progress in the different studies. For that purpose, a Royal Inspector, commonly a General Officer, accompanied by two Members of the Academy, made every year a review of the schools. The examination was made, in his presence, with the most scrupulous exactness; and those of the pupils who, to their proficiency in study, received the the testimony of the Regents in favours of their character, were admitted to the Military School of Paris.

From their entrance into the school at an early age, the minds and bodies of the pupils were kept in constant employment; and their instruction continued for 7 or 8 years; during which time, the most unremitting care was equally bestowed on all. The most able masters in every branch gave up all their time to direct the studies of the youth, and inspire them with sentiments of virtue. The study of ancient and modern languages, of history, of geography, of mathematics, and the various branches of military science, formed the basis of their education. And in these

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establishments, while the utmost attention was paid to youthful instruction, the agreeable was not forgotten; that, by rendering science amiable, the youth might not contract that dryness of manner which too frequently accompanies profound erudition.

It was in one of these schools that the Count de Marbois was desirous to place the young Bonaparte. Corsica, since being united to France, had obtained for its inhabitants, among other privileges that of sharing the royal beneficence; so that the Count had no difficulty to procure for his *protégé* the place of one of the *Elèves du Roi*.

The Marechal de Segur, then Minister of War, and charged with the department of Military Schools, placed Bonaparte in that of Brienne, in Champagne; in which he entered, I believe, in the beginning of the year 1779.

It was about fifteen or eighteen months afterwards, that my father, availing himself of the right which all strangers of family had to educate their children in these royal institutions, sent me there to begin my education. Different in temper and character, and younger than Bonaparte, I formed no particular friendship with him; but living under the same roof, and sharing the same exercises, I remarked him early as something extraordinary, perceiving not one, among one hundred and fifty youths, who in the least resembled him, either

in disposition or taste. In this I only confirmed an idea very generally allowed, that children are often more observing than they appear to be. Of this, curiosity is probably in them the only cause, being more eager in youth than advanced age; and a young person, without troubling himself about the reason, which his faculties are not yet able to reach, has his attention attracted and fixed only by that which strikes him. Bonaparte, with inclinations different from his companions, separated himself from us, and therefore became, naturally enough, the object of our observation.

I do not recollect, that he ever shewed the slightest partiality in favour of any of his comrades; gloomy and fierce to excess, almost always by himself; one might say, that newly issued from a forest, and, till then, withdrawn from the sight of men, he now began, for the first time, to feel the impressions of surprise and of suspicion. Continually alone, averse likewise to all that is called children's plays and amusements, he never was seen to share in the noisy mirth of his school-fellows! very far from that, if sometimes he came among them, it was only to find fault, notwithstanding the known danger to which a *boy-pedagogue* inevitably exposes himself, by reprimanding his young companions; a danger of which his growing courage had early taught him not to be afraid; for, when attacked by a number of our school-fellows, whom his

reilleries had provoked, I have seen him repeat, with the utmost *sang froid*, their blows and united efforts! Thus, so young, Bonaparte seemed to disdain to be no more but a child, as if he had already foreseen that destiny would one day call him to surmount the greatest obstacles.

BONAPARTE shewed very early the desire, or rather the need of liberty. The love of his country (the Island of Corsica, which he then considered as his native home) triumphed already over the sentiment of gratitude due to the bounty of the King. The idea of dependence appeared to him degrading; he was humbled by it; and often indignant to be exposed to the malicious witticisms of his comrades on the union of Corsica to the monarchy of France. "I hope to be able," replied he, in the tone of an offended spirit, "I hope to be able, one day, to restore it to freedom?" Unconscious then, that he was to be called in a few years to fix the power of France itself, and decide the fate of the other great states of Europe.

His first steps in learning were not marked by any extraordinary progress; and whether from carelessness or dislike, he gave but little application to the study of the Latin tongue. This negligence appears so much the more astonishing, as his desire of instruction and occupation very soon became in him a real

passion; but latent genius already directed his
 choice to the study of those branches of know-
 ledge, which were afterwards to become the
 instruments of his glory. Mathematics, for-
 tification, the attack and defence of places,
 but, above all, the study of history, occupied
 all his time. To these studies he gave him-
 self up without relaxation; and I have no
 doubt but his enthusiasm originated in his
 favorite reading of the lives of great and
 illustrious men, whom he had, from the begin-
 ning, proposed to himself as proper models.
 No one was able to judge better than myself
 of the uncommon avidity with which he pur-
 sued his readings; and the great connections
 which we had together on that head, were,
 doubtless, what contributed to fix my atten-
 tion upon him in so particular a manner. To
 explain that more clearly, it is necessary to
 mention an establishment which had taken place,
 in the Military School of Brienne, during
 the residence of Bonaparte, which was the
 foundation of a library entirely under the
 direction of the young men, and destined to
 their pleasure and instruction.

But, to give us proper notions of arrange-
 ment, your superiors proposed to leave the
 distribution of the books, and the administra-
 tion of the funds, dedicated to the support
 of the library, to the absolute management
 of two of the boarders, to be chosen by their
 comrades. I was one of those whom my

school-fellows had named to that employment, to which I gave the leisure hours of three years, perhaps the most pleasant in my life. It was then that I had repeated opportunities to see Bonaparte, who, perhaps, in preference to me, ought to have been chosen the librarian; but our companions thought otherwise; and probably he would have disdained the appointment, believing all the moments lost to his own instruction which he must have sacrificed to the minute detail of such an office. However that may be, his calls became so very frequent as to render me unreasonably out of humour. It is in the nature of man, and, in my own justification, not less in that of children, to arrogate to themselves, by degrees, all the privileges of authority. It was, indeed, my duty, to have been complaisant, but I found it more convenient to be capricious. Plagued by demands so often repeated, I sometimes pretended to mistake his application for teasing and intentional importunities; and sometimes, also, I had reason to repent my rudeness. Bonaparte, young, was not more patient, nor less positive than now, and has made me frequently feel, that it was almost unsafe to provoke him. At that time I should have been ashamed to own it, but at present such a confession is not so painful.

Reserved in his temper, and wholly occupied by his own pursuits, Bonaparte courted that solitude which seemed to constitute

his delight. He employed, during a long time, some of the hours allowed to recreation, in cultivating, as a little garden, that spot which fell to his share, of a considerable portion of ground which was divided among us. After having forced two of his partners to give it up entirely to him, his first care was to render the access to it difficult, by means of a strong palisade; in forming which, he spent all the money which the *Couat de Marbeuf* had sent to him for his little expences. The green arbours, which he planted himself, and cultivated with the utmost pains, rendered his garden, at the end of two years, the retreat of a perfect hermit. Woe to the curious, the malicious, or the playful, who dared to trouble his repose! You might see him burst furious, from his retreat to repel them! nor was he deterred by the number of his assailants. It was in this concealed retirement, where the soul of *Boissypante*, greedy of glory, insensibly evolved the seed of that noble ambition, feasting on the example of those great men whom he was preparing himself to surpass.

A mode of life so very singular, could not fail to be remarked. Incapable to estimate his uncommon merit, or rather to penetrate his true motives, his superiors, and his school-fellows, taxed him as foolish and ridiculous. Every mean was tried, but in vain, to restore him to himself; by making him change his

conduct. Insensible to affronts which he could not resent; he repelled the raileries of the matters by silence and disdain. Humiliation, and even punishment, which were also employed had no better success.

I believe I have forgotten to mention, that the meetings of the young men were established on a military footing. Divided into companies, they composed a little battalion, the Colonel and all the officers of which, chosen among ourselves, were decorated by the ornaments which distinguish the French uniform. Bonaparte had the rank of Captain. One would suppose that he must be sensible to the loss of a distinction only granted to merit, and every day becoming more flattering from the eagerness by which it was sought for by the young men. A council of war, established with all its forms, declared him unworthy to command those comrades whose good will he despised. After the sentence was read, which degraded him to the last place of the battalion, he was stripped of the distinguishing marks of his rank. Bonaparte appeared insensible to the affront, or disdained, at least, to show that he was affected by it; his superiors; perhaps, repented having obliged him to undergo this disgrace; but his comrades, from that time, restored to him their friendship, because generous minded youth ceases to persecute those who are unfortunate.

THIS conduct had the most happy effect. Bonaparte testified his sense of the generosity of his young friends. He continued his studies, but became more sociable with his school-fellows; he joined sometimes in our games, and acquired by that a right to propose, in his turn, some new diversion. It would have been little amusement to him, if he could not have united utility with pleasure; and, in fact, the plays which he proposed, marked strongly his character. The Olympic games of Greece, and those of the Circus of Rome, were the models he proposed for our imitation. Novelty pleases children, particularly those of France. Bonaparte became our leader, and the loss of his title of Captain was soon replaced by that of Director of our diversions, which was unanimously granted to him. If men, in their pleasures, almost always exceed the limits of moderation, we may easily suppose that virtue to be still more seldom the lot of young people. Our games became battles; by turns Romans and Carthaginians, Greeks and Persians, we believed ourselves called upon to imitate the enthusiastic fury of those ancient warriors. Stones were weapons, and often productive of wounds, so that our superiors found themselves obliged to repress our courage. The games were forbidden, and our General severely reprimanded. Bonaparte withdrew himself into his favourite garden, resumed his former occupations, and appeared no more among us, till the snow, covering the ground, and concealing the stones,

furnished him with a pretext to open a new campaign.

The hostilities became, necessarily, of another sort, and the modern art of war succeeded to that of the ancient. Being seriously occupied by the study of fortification, he wished to put his theory in practice; and soon entrenchments, forts, bastions and redoubts were erected of snow, in the great court of the school. We all laboured at these works with an activity and pleasure which can be easily imagined, the young Bonaparte directing our operations. The whole was executed with so much art and exactness, as to excite the curiosity of the town, and even of strangers, who came in crowds, during the winter, to admire our fortifications of snow!

As soon as these works were finished, we had no peace till the order of attack and defence was settled. Bonaparte again took the care of directing our motions: and, by turns, at the head of assailants and opponents, he learned betimes, from these useful games, to unite address with courage. Snow-balls were the weapons of both parties, and the wounds they gave, not being mortal, our masters saw our diversions without alarm; they even had the good sense to encourage them, by applauding those who distinguished themselves, whether by their courage, or by some new stratagem. Bonaparte,

already fertile in expedients, found means to keep up the diversion, by devising, every day, some new manœuvres; but the 1st of the month of March disturbed our amusements, and put an end to them till the winter.

Such was the school, and such the first essay of the young hero, who, since, at the head of a new raised army, without discipline, and almost without confidence, has known how to conquer the bravest troops of Europe, and disconcert the measures of the most experienced Generals. Eager to gain the approbation of his young rivals, it was in these juvenile plays that he first learned the way to conquer; from them sprung that warlike enthusiasm, which afforded the first display of his great genius! Kindled into admiration of the heroes of antiquity, their great actions and virtues became his models, and the glory of surpassing them the object of his life.

Notwithstanding the constant exercise and amusements of which I have spoken, and in which, Bonaparte took so active a part, I am fully persuaded that his constitution suffered much from long inaction, during his first years at school. A too close application may perhaps retard more than a long continued repose; for, tho' of a form calculated to resist fatigue, and of much natural strength, he had always the appearance of a weak and delicate health.

Altho' of a middle stature, he is remarkable for the breadth of his shoulders; his eyes, of a deep blue, are small but animated; his hair brown, his forehead large and prominent; his chin sharp, his face long, and his complexion olive; the general expression of his countenance does not strike at first sight, but in observing him with attention, you readily distinguish the traces of deep thinking, and the vivacity of his looks indicate energy and activity.

His withdrawing from the society of his comrades, had given a rudeness, perhaps a ferocity, to his manner; and subject to violent passion, his anger against his young companions sometimes amounted even to fury: the instance I am going to repeat is most characteristic.

Every year, on the 25th. of August, the day of St. Louis, the pupils of the Military School, in honour of the King, were permitted, almost without restraint, to give themselves up to pleasure, and the most noisy demonstrations of joy. Every species of punishment was suspended during that happy day; and it is easy to foresee, that it could seldom pass, without being attended by some accident: but, without blaming or excusing that too great indulgence of our masters I will only recount that of which I was an eye-witness.

Whenever a pupil had reached the age of fourteen, a custom (which we kept up with great care) give him the privilege to purchase a quantity of gun-powder for St. Louis day; and during the fortnight which preceded the solemnity, the young people of that age associated together to prepare fire-works. The indulgency went even so far, as to intrust them with some small pieces of artillery, some muskets and pistols, which were fired to announce the day. What joy! what moment! perhaps the most happy of our lives.

So complete and so animated was the general pleasure amongst the scholars, as to render more remarkable the indifference, real or affected, which Bonaparte testified on that occasion, being the last year (1785.) which he passed at the school of Brienne. Retired the whole day in his garden, he not only did not participate in the public rejoicing, but affected to continue his usual study and occupations, without being disturbed by the noise. His comrades were too much engaged in their own amusement, to think of troubling his, and would only have laughed at him, if his strange behaviour, in an uncommon circumstance, had not drawn upon him the general attention.

Towards nine o'clock of the evening, about twenty of the young people were assembled in that garden which joined to his, where the proprietor had promised a show to his friends.

It was a pyramid, composed of different kinds of fire-works, to be play'd off; unfortunately, he had forgotten to remove a little box, containing several pounds of powder; and the spectators little imagined how dear they were about to pay for their innocent curiosity. We were pressing round the little building, to which he had set fire; and, while we were admiring the effect, some unlucky sparks entered the fatal magazine: the explosion was dreadful! some legs and arms broken, two or three faces miserably burned, and some paces of wall thrown down, were the disagreeable consequences of it: but while, to save themselves, all those whom the splinters had not reached, were breaking down the pallisades of the neighbouring gardens, Bonaparte was seen, armed with a pick-ax, pushing back, into the fire all those who had burst through his fence; he became enraged in seeing the destruction of his arbour, and the blows which he bestowed on the unhappy fugitives, increased the number of the wounded. It is needless to say how our comrades were revenged; Bonaparte himself, without doubt, would own now that he justly deserved our resentment; but at that time he thought of nothing but his ruined garden: he had no concern in the imprudence of his companions, and he thought it hard to be the victim of it. Exasperated, perhaps, by the noisy demonstrations of a joy of which his heart did not partake, it is also very reasonable to suppose that rejoicings in honour of a King;

might have excited the ill-humour of a Republican; and Bonaparte had long manifested his sentiments in that respect. However that may be, time seems to have much softened that unfeeling roughness, for he is not less celebrated by his moderation towards his enemies, than by his most brilliant exploits.

Bonaparte quitted the school of Brienne at the end of the year 1785. M. le Chevalier Renault, then Inspector General, knew how to estimate the merit of that young man, to which he did justice, notwithstanding the bitter complaints of his masters, whom his hard stubborn character had generally rendered unfriendly to him.

There was, in that year, a promotion of several of the King's pupils, whom their progress in the studies, had rendered worthy to be sent to the Military School of Paris: Bonaparte was of the number; his talents gave him value in the eyes of a gallant officer, who himself owed his preferment and his fortune to his own merit, and to the universal testimony of an irreproachable conduct. On his arrival at Paris, he testified his inclination to serve in the artillery, because this and the engineers were the only corps in France where interest and riches could not so easily usurp the place due to merit: He applied himself, with an unwearied zeal, to the mathematics, which then became his principal

study, and was soon in a situation to go thro' the necessary examinations. He acquitted himself with credit, and was then promoted to the rank of an officer in the regiment de la Fere, shortly before the revolution.

From the principles which he had avowed so early, it is natural to believe that Bonaparte, at that memorable epoch, did not hesitate to declare in favour of independence. Always unalterable in his dislike of royalty, and devoted to the love of glory, his ambition did not neglect so favourable an opportunity to signalize himself, as was presented by the revolution. It is in difficult situations, that a strong mind can best force itself into notice; in that moment, when timid indecision betrays its own weakness, it never hesitates to separate from the crowd; to triumph, or to die with glory, are the only alternatives, and from these nothing can turn it aside. Notwithstanding the danger of an early declaration in the beginning of the disturbances, Bonaparte declined to feign. He declared himself in favour of freedom. Almost all his brother-officers blamed him for so prompt a decision; and the spirit of party occasioned soon after the most violent altercations between him and them, so that it was fortunate the loss of their friendship did not cost him his life.

One day, walking by a river-side with some young officers, with whom he generally associated, the dispute ran high, and in a moment of enthusiasm, of which there have been numerous instances in all the wars of opinion, the young people, enraged, seized Bonaparte, and were on the point of throwing him headlong into the stream, when a momentary reflection made them perceive the shameful inequality of the number. Bonaparte could not be forced to retract his mode of thinking, the danger which he had run altered not his plan; but he broke off all connection with his companions, till the revolutionary spirit, having made more progress, induced some of those who had condemned him, to adopt, shortly after, the same opinion.

The others listening to nothing but their attachment to the King, and despairing to be able to aid his cause at the head of troops who had the most decidedly revolted against him, took the desperate resolution to sacrifice their rank and fortune to the sentiments of honour and probity, by which they were animated. Their departure, still rendered more exasperated those of their comrades who were attached to the opposite party. From that time they themselves elevated the standard of revolt, excited the soldiers to sedition, and gave publicly an example of the most violent excesses!— But I must drop the curtain on such afflicting scenes!

It is true Barras, a powerful friend, seconded his personal merit, and facilitated his entry into that career in which he has equalled the most celebrated heroes.

In 1790, Bonaparte accompanied to Corsica General Paoli, who had made some stay at Paris. During the three years that he remained with his family, he employed the whole of his time in improving himself still more in the theory of military science; but the disturbances which arose in that island in 1793, after the accusation brought against Paoli by the Convention, determined him to return to France.—He persuaded his parents to accompany him, and the family settled near Toulon.—The siege of that town, then occupied by the English, having taken place soon after Bonaparte was promoted by Barras and the other Commissioners, to the rank of General of the artillery: It was there he gave the first proofs of his military genius. Intrusted to direct the attack of the redoubts and outworks which formed the defence of the place, his bold and enterprising genius devised a plan which one would have thought impracticable, if the courage, of which he set the example, and knew so well how to communicate to his army, had not taught us that he was not less capable to execute than to project.

In the reign of Robespierre, which immediately followed the retaking of Toulon, was unfavourable to noble actions, and an ignominious death becoming the lot of whosoever excited the jealousy of that monster, condemned true merit to silence and retirement. — I imagined Bonaparte to have been among the number of the victims, but the event of the 13th Vendemiaire undeceived me. — Barras, who directed, on that occasion, the measures of the government against the revolted sections, intrusted to him the command of the Conventional army, after the resignation of General Gentili, whose deafness was an obstacle to the discharge of the duty of his post. The most complete success justified still more the partiality of Barras for the young Bonaparte. Paris, on the point of being reduced to ashes, saw its interior calm restored. — The Convention was indebted for its triumph to Bonaparte; and France, appeased as much by his firmness as by his courage, owed to him the preservation of a number of its citizens, whom a senseless fury had excited to destroy each other.

From that period, to the moment when the French government formed the project of carrying the war into Italy, the public life of Bonaparte offers nothing very interesting; but the unfavourable auspices under which he was intrusted with the conduct of that dangerous expedition, contributed not a little to heighten his reputation.

The ferocious Robespierre had sacrificed to his fury the best generals of France: Custine and Houchard, both well known by their great successes, had perished on a scaffold; Dumourier had betrayed his trust, and Pichegru, the conqueror of Holland, had been recalled; when Bonaparte, still very young, was chosen to retrieve so many disasters.

On the eve of engaging the best troops and the most experienced generals of Europe, and in a country where nature presents on every side obstacles which Hannibal alone had been able to overcome, the French troops could have little confidence in the conduct of a general only 26 years old; unprovided, as they were, of magazines, inexperienced till now in the art of war, and in want of cloaths, the soldiers did not seem encouraged by the appearance of their new chief. — His exterior, not very prepossessing, gave occasion to many of their jokes.

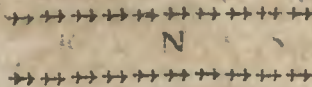
BONAPARTE, far from being alarmed by these obstacles, did not seem at all affected by them. Persuaded that the attachment of soldiers cannot be forced, he sought the only true means of rendering himself worthy of their confidence.

The pressing wants of his troops became the first object of his attention; he employed himself unceasingly to supply them, and, in a little time, his unremitting activity had provided for every thing.

The army being now in a condition to act offensively, the campaign was hardly open when the first essays of that ill-organiz'd army were marked by very important successes.

From this time I cannot follow the hero, a pen bolder than mine is destined to record facts which posterity will hardly be able to credit.

BONAPARTE is all activity, and every-where the same, whether you behold him fighting, negotiating or punishing; it is always an affair of a moment, of a word. — Never any hesitation, he cuts the gordian knot which he cannot untie.



FALKIRK: T JOHNSTON,
 —PRINTER.—