

**NAPOLEON BONAPARTE**



**LETTERS TO  
JOSEPHINE**

**Napoleon Bonaparte**

# **Letters to Josephine**

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- Advanced Digital Solutions & High-Quality eBook  
Formatting -

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2021 OK Publishing

EAN 4066338115812

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# PREFACE

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I have no apology to offer for the subject of this book, in view of Lord Rosebery's testimony that, until recently, we knew nothing about Napoleon, and even now "prefer to drink at any other source than the original."

"Study of Napoleon's utterances, apart from any attempt to discover the secret of his prodigious exploits, cannot be considered as lost time." It is then absolutely necessary that we should, in the words of an eminent but unsympathetic divine, know something of the "domestic side of the monster," first hand from his own correspondence, confirmed or corrected by contemporaries. There is no master mind that we can less afford to be ignorant of. To know more of the doings of Pericles and Aspasia, of the two Cæsars and the Serpent of old Nile, of Mary Stuart and Rizzio, of the Green Faction and the Blue, of Orsini and Colonna, than of the Bonapartes and Beauharnais, is worthy of a student of folklore rather than of history.

Napoleon was not only a King of Kings, he was a King of Words and of Facts, which "are the sons of heaven, while words are the daughters of earth," and whose progeny, the Genii of the Code, still dominates Christendom.<sup>1</sup> In the hurly-burly of the French War, on the chilling morrow of its balance-sheet, in the Janus alliance of the Second Empire, we could not get rid of the nightmare of the Great Shadow. Most modern works on the Napoleonic period (Lord Rosebery's "Last Phase" being a brilliant exception) seem to

be (1) too long, (2) too little confined to contemporary sources. The first fault, especially if merely discursive enthusiasm, is excusable, the latter pernicious, for, as Dr. Johnson says of Robertson, "You are sure he does not know the people whom he paints, so you cannot suppose a likeness. Characters should never be given by a historian unless he knew the people whom he describes, *or copies from those who knew him.*"

Now, if ever, we must *fix* and *crystallise* the life-work of Napoleon for posterity, for "when an opinion has once become popular, very few are willing to oppose it. Idleness is more willing to credit than inquire ... and he that writes merely for sale is tempted to court purchasers by flattering the prejudices of the public."<sup>2</sup> We have accumulated practically all the evidence, and are not yet so remote from the aspirations and springs of action of a century ago as to be out of touch with them. The Vaccination and Education questions are still before us; so is the cure of croup and the composition of electricity. We have special reasons for sympathy with the first failures of Fulton, and can appreciate Napoleon's primitive but effective expedients for modern telegraphy and transport, which were as far in advance of his era as his nephew's ignorance of railway warfare in 1870 was behind it. We must admire The Man<sup>3</sup> who found within the fields of France the command of the Tropics, and who needed nothing but time to prosper Corsican cotton and Solingen steel. The man's words and deeds are still vigorous and alive; in another generation many of them will be dead as Marley—"dead as a door-nail." Let us then each to his task, and each try, as best he may,

to weigh in honest scales the modern Hannibal—"our last great man,"<sup>4</sup> "the mightiest genius of two thousand years."<sup>5</sup>

H. F. HALL.

# INTRODUCTION

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Difficulties of translation—Napoleon as lexicographer and bookworm—Historic value of his Bulletins—A few aspects of Napoleon's character—"Approfondissez!"—The need of a Creator—The influence of sea power—England's future rival—Napoleon as average adjuster—His use of Freemasonry—Of the Catholics and of the Jews—His neglect of women in politics—Josephine a failure—His incessant work, "which knew no rest save change of occupation"—His attachment to early friendships—The Bonaparte family—His influence on literary men—Conversations with Wieland and Müller—Verdict of a British tar—The character of Josephine—Sources of the Letters—The Tennant Collection—The Didot Collection—Archibald Constable and Sir Walter Scott—Correspondence of Napoleon I.—Report of the Commission—Contemporary sources—The Diary—Napoleon's heritage.

Napoleon is by no means an easy writer to translate adequately. He had always a terse, concise mode of speaking, and this, with the constant habit of dictating, became accentuated. Whenever he could use a short, compact word he did so. The greatest temptation has been to render his very modern ideas by modern colloquialisms. Occasionally, where Murray's Dictionary proves that the word was in vogue a century ago, we have used a somewhat rarer word than Napoleon's equivalent, as *e.g.*

"coolth," in Letter No. 6, Series B (*pendant le frais*), in order to preserve as far as possible the brevity and crispness of the original. Napoleon's vocabulary was not specially wide, but always exact. In expletive it was extensive and peculiar. Judging his brother by himself, he did not consider Lucien sufficient of a purist in French literature to write epics; and the same remark would have been partly true of the Emperor, who, however, was always at considerable pains to verify any word of which he did not know the exact meaning.<sup>6</sup> His own appetite for literature was enormous, especially during the year's garrison life he spent at Valence, where he read and re-read the contents of a *bouquiniste's* shop, and, what is more, remembered them, so much so that, nearly a quarter of a century later, he was able to correct the dates of ecclesiastical experts at Erfurt. Whatever he says or whatever he writes, one always finds a specific gravity of stark, staring facts altogether abnormal. For generations it was the fashion to consider "as false as a bulletin" peculiar to Napoleon's despatches; but the publication of Napoleon's correspondence, by order of Napoleon III., has changed all that. In the first place, as to dates. Not only have Haydn, Woodward and Cates, and the *Encyclopædia Britannica* made mistakes during this period, but even the *Biographie Universelle* (usually so careful) is not immaculate. Secondly, with regard to the descriptions of the battles. We have never found one that in accuracy and truthfulness would not compare to conspicuous advantage with some of those with which we were only too familiar in December 1899. Napoleon was sometimes 1200 miles away from home; he had to gauge the effect of his bulletins from



one end to the other of the largest effective empire that the world has ever seen, and, like Dr. Johnson in Fleet Street reporting Parliamentary debates (but with a hundred times more reason), he was determined not to let the other dogs have the best of it. The notes on the battles of Eylau (Series H) and Essling (Series L), the two most conspicuous examples of where it was necessary to colour the bulletins, will show what is meant. Carlyle was the first to point out that his despatches are as instinct with genius as his conquests—his very words have "Austerlitz battles" in them. The reference to "General Danube," in 1809, as the best general the Austrians had, was one of those flashes of inspiration which military writers, from Napoleon to Lord Wolseley, have shown to be a determining factor in every doubtful fray.

"*Approfondissez*—go to the bottom of things," wrote Lord Chesterfield; and this might have been the life-motto of the Emperor. But to adopt this fundamental common-sense with regard to the character of Napoleon is almost impossible; it is, to use the metaphor of Lord Rosebery, like trying to span a mountain with a tape. We can but indicate a few leading features. In the first place, he had, like the great Stagirite, an eye at once telescopic and microscopic. Beyond the *mécanique céleste*, beyond the nebulous reign of chaos and old night, his ken pierced the primal truth—the need of a Creator: "not every one can be an atheist who wishes it." No man saw deeper into the causes of things. The influence of sea power on history, to take one example, was never absent from his thoughts. Slowly and laboriously he built and rebuilt his fleets, only to fall into the hands of his

"Punic" rival. Beaten at sea, he has but two weapons left against England—to "conquer her by land," or to stir up a maritime rival who will sooner or later avenge him. We have the Emperor Alexander's testimony from the merchants of Manchester, Birmingham, and Liverpool how nearly his Continental System *had* ruined us. The rival raised up beyond the western waves by the astute sale of Louisiana is still growing. In less than a decade Napoleon had a first crumb of comfort (when such crumbs were rare) in hearing of the victories of the *Constitution* over British frigates.

As for his microscopic eye, we know of nothing like it in all history. In focussing the facets, we seem to shadow out the main secret of his success—his ceaseless survey of all sorts and conditions of knowledge. "Never despise local information," he wrote Murat, who was at Naples, little anticipating the extremes of good and evil fortune which awaited him there. Another characteristic—one in which he surpassed alike the theory of Macchiavelli and the practice of the Medici—was his use of *la bascule*, with himself as equilibrist or average adjuster, as the only safe principle of government. Opinions on the whole<sup>7</sup> lean to the idea that, up to the First Consulate, Napoleon was an active Freemason, at a time when politics were permitted, and when the Grand Orient, having initiated Voltaire almost on his deathbed, and having been submerged by the Terror, was beginning to show new life. In any case, we have in O'Meara the Emperor's statement (and this is rather against the theory of Napoleon being more than his brother Joseph, a mere patron of the craft) that he encouraged the brotherhood. Cambacérès had more Masonic degrees than

probably any man before or since, and no man was so long and so consistently trusted by Napoleon, with one short and significant exception. Then there was the *gendarmérie d'élite*, then the ordinary police, the myrmidons of Fouché of Nantes—in fact, if we take Lord Rosebery literally, Napoleon had "half-a-dozen police agencies of his own." There was also Talleyrand and, during the Concordats, the whole priest-craft of Christendom as enlisting sergeants and spies extraordinary for the Emperor. Finally, when he wishes to attack Russia, he convokes a Sanhedrim at Paris, and wins the active sympathies of Israel. "He was his own War Office, his own Foreign Office, his own Admiralty."<sup>8</sup> His weak spot was his neglect of woman as a political factor; this department he left to Josephine, who was a failure. She gained popularity, but no converts. The Faubourg St. Germain mistrusted a woman whose chief friend was the wife of Thermidorian Tallien—Notre Dame de Septembre. In vain Napoleon raged and stormed about the Tallien friendship, till his final mandate in 1806; and then it was too late.

Another characteristic, very marked in these Home Letters, is the desire not to give his wife anxiety. His ailments and his difficulties are always minimised.

Perhaps no man ever worked so hard physically and mentally as Napoleon from 1796 to 1814. Lord Rosebery reminds us that "he would post from Poland to Paris, summon a council at once, and preside over it with his usual vigour and acuteness." And his councils were no joke; they would last eight or ten hours. Once, at two o'clock in the morning, the councillors were all worn-out; the Minister of

Marine was fast asleep. Napoleon still urged them to further deliberation: "Come, gentlemen, pull yourselves together; it is only two o'clock, we must earn the money that the nation gives us." The Commission who first sifted the *Correspondence* may well speak of the ceaseless workings of that mind, which *knew no rest save change of occupation*, and of "that universal intelligence from which nothing escaped." The chief fault in Napoleon as a statesman was intrinsically a virtue, viz., his good nature. There was, as Sir Walter Scott has said, "gentleness and even softness in his character. It was his common and expressive phrase that the heart of a politician should be in his head; but his feelings sometimes surprised him in a gentler mood."

To be a relation of his own or his wife's, to have been a friend in his time of stress, was to have a claim on Napoleon's support which no subsequent treachery to himself could efface. From the days of his new power—political power, first the Consulate and then the Empire—he lavished gifts and favours even on the most undeserving of his early comrades. Fouché, Talleyrand, Bernadotte were forgiven once, twice, and again, to his own final ruin. Like Medea, one of whose other exploits he had evoked in a bulletin, he could say—but to his honour and not to his shame—

"Si possem, sanior essem.  
Sed trahit invitam nova vis; aliudque Cupido,  
Mens aliud suadet. Video meliora, proboque  
Deteriora sequor."

Treachery and peculation against the State was different, as Moreau, Bourrienne, and even Massena and Murat discovered.

As for his family, they were a flabby and somewhat sensual lot, with the exception of Lucien, who was sufficiently capable to be hopelessly impracticable. He was, however, infinitely more competent than the effeminate Joseph and the melancholy Louis, and seems to have had more command of parliamentary oratory than Napoleon himself.

Napoleon's influence on literary men may be gauged by what Wieland<sup>9</sup> and Müller<sup>10</sup> reported of their interview with him at Erfurt. That with Wieland took place at the ball which followed the entertainment on the field of Jena. "I was presented," he says, "by the Duchess of Weimar, with the usual ceremonies; he then paid me some compliments in an affable tone, and looked steadfastly at me. Few men have appeared to me to possess, in the same degree, the art of reading at the first glance the thoughts of other men. He saw, in an instant, that notwithstanding my celebrity I was simple in my manners and void of pretension; and, as he seemed desirous of making a favourable impression on me, he assumed the tone most likely to attain his end. I have never beheld any one more calm, more simple, more mild, or less ostentatious in appearance; nothing about him indicated the feeling of power in a great monarch; he spoke to me as an old acquaintance would speak to an equal; and what was more extraordinary on his part, he conversed with me exclusively for an hour and a half, to the great surprise of the whole assembly."

Wieland has related part of their conversation, which is, as it could not fail to be, highly interesting. They touched on a variety of subjects; among others, the ancients. Napoleon declared his preference of the Romans to the Greeks. "The eternal squabbles of their petty republics," he said, "were not calculated to give birth to anything grand; whereas the Romans were always occupied with great things, and it was owing to this they raised up the Colossus which bestrode the world." This preference was characteristic; the following is anomalous: "He preferred Ossian to Homer." "He was fond only of serious poetry," continues Wieland; "the pathetic and vigorous writers; and, above all, the tragic poets. He appeared to have no relish for anything gay; and in spite of the prepossessing amenity of his manners, an observation struck me often, he seemed to be of bronze. Nevertheless, he had put me so much at my ease that I ventured to ask how it was that the public worship he had restored in France was not more philosophical and in harmony with the spirit of the times? 'My dear Wieland,' he replied, 'religion is not meant for philosophers; they have no faith either in me or my priests. As to those who do believe, it would be difficult to give them or to leave them too much of the marvellous. If I had to frame a religion for philosophers, it would be just the reverse of that of the credulous part of mankind.'"<sup>11</sup>

Müller, the celebrated Swiss historian, who had a private interview with Napoleon at this period, has left a still fuller account of the impression he received. "The Emperor<sup>12</sup> began to speak," says Müller, "of the history of Switzerland, told me that I ought to complete it, that even the more recent times had their interest. He proceeded from the

Swiss to the old Greek constitutions and history; to the theory of constitutions; to the complete diversity of those of Asia, and the causes of this diversity in the climate, polygamy, &c.; the opposite characters of the Arabian and the Tartar races; the peculiar value of European culture, and the progress of freedom since the sixteenth century; how everything was linked together, and in the inscrutable guidance of an invisible hand; how he himself had become great through his enemies; the great confederation of nations, the idea of which Henry IV. had; the foundation of all religion, and its necessity; that man could not bear clear truth, and required to be kept in order; admitting the possibility, however, of a more happy condition if the numerous feuds ceased, which were occasioned by too complicated constitutions (such as the German), and the intolerable burden suffered by states from excessive armies." These opinions clearly mark the guiding motives of Napoleon's attempts to enforce upon different nations uniformity of institutions and customs. "I opposed him occasionally," says Müller, "and he entered into discussion. Quite impartially and truly, as before God, I must say that the variety of his knowledge, the acuteness of his observations, the solidity of his understanding (not dazzling wit), his grand and comprehensive views, filled me with astonishment, and his manner of speaking to me, with love for him. By his genius and his disinterested goodness, he has also conquered me." Slowly but surely they are conquering the world. Of his goodness we have the well-weighed verdict of Lord Acton, that it was "the most splendid that has appeared on earth." Of his goodness, we

may at least concur in the opinion of the old British tar at Elba, quoted by Sir Walter, and evidently his own view, that "Boney was a d—d good fellow after all."

With regard to the character of *Josephine* opinions still differ about every quality but one. Like the friend of Goldsmith's mad dog—

"A kind and gentle heart she had  
To comfort friends and foes:"

either her brother Mason Cambacérès, or her brother Catholic and unbrotherly brother-in-law Lucien.

From early days she had learnt "how to flirt and how to fib." Morality was at a low ebb during the French Revolution, when women often saved their necks at the expense of their bodies, and there is unfortunately no doubt that Josephine was no exception. It is certain, however, from his first letters to Josephine, that Napoleon knew nothing of this at the time of his honeymoon (solus) in Italy. Gradually, but very unwillingly, his eyes were opened, and by the time he had reached Egypt he felt himself absolved from the absolute faithfulness he had hitherto preserved towards his wife. On his return Josephine becomes once more his consort, and even his friend—never again his only love. Josephine's main characteristic henceforward is to make everybody happy and comfortable—in spite of Napoleon's grumblings at her reckless prodigality; never to say No! (except to her husband's accusations) suits her Creole disposition best, especially as it costs her no active exertion, and the Emperor pays for all. And so, having been in turn Our Lady



of Victories and Saint Mary the Egyptian, she becomes from her coronation to her death-day "The Mother of the Poor."

The Sources of the Letters.—These may be divided into three parts—(1st) the Early Love-Letters of 1796; (2nd) the Collection published by Didot Frères in 1833; and (3rd) the few scattered Letters gathered from various outside sources.

(1st) With regard to the Early Love-Letters of 1796, these are found most complete in a work published by Longmans in 1824, in two volumes, with the title, "A Tour through Parts of the Netherlands, Holland, Germany, Switzerland, Savoy, and France, in the year 1821-2, by Charles Tennant, Esq.; also containing in an Appendix Fac-simile Copies of Eight Letters in the handwriting of Napoleon Bonaparte to his wife Josephine."

The author introduces them with an interesting preface, which shows that then, as now, the interest in everything connected with Napoleon was unabated:—

"Long after this fleeting book shall have passed away, and with its author shall have been forgotten, these documents will remain; for here, perhaps, is to be found the purest source of information which exists, touching the private character of Napoleon Bonaparte, known, probably, but to the few whose situations have enabled them to observe that extraordinary man in the undisguised relations of domestic life. Although much already has been said and written of him, yet the eagerness with which every little anecdote and incident of his life is sought for shows the interest which still attaches to his name, and these, no doubt, will be bequests which posterity will duly estimate.

From these it will be the province of future historians to cull and select simple and authenticated facts, and from these only can be drawn a true picture of the man whose fame has already extended into every distant region of the habitable globe.

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"I will now proceed to relate the means by which I am enabled to introduce into this journal fac-simile copies of eight letters in the handwriting of Napoleon Bonaparte, the originals of which are in my possession. Had these been of a political nature, much as I should prize any relics of such a man, yet they would not have appeared in a book from which I have studiously excluded all controversial topics, and more especially those of a political character. Neither should I have ventured upon their publication if there were a possibility that by so doing I might wound the feelings of any human being. Death has closed the cares of the individuals connected with these letters. Like the memorials of Alexander the Great or of Charlemagne, they are the property of the possessor, and through him of the public; but not like ancient documents, dependent upon legendary evidence for their identity and truth.

"These have passed to me through two hands only, since they came into possession of the Empress Josephine, to whom they are written by their illustrious author. One of the individuals here alluded to, and from whom I received these letters, is a Polish nobleman, who attached himself and his fortunes to Bonaparte, whose confidence he enjoyed in several important diplomatic negotiations."

This book and these letters were known to Sir Walter Scott, who made use of some of them in his *History of Napoleon*. M. Aubenas, in his *Histoire de l'Impératrice Joséphine*, published in 1857, which has been lavishly made use of in a recent work on the same subject, seems to have known, at any rate, four of these letters, which were communicated to him by M. le Baron Feuillet de Conches. Monsieur Aubenas seems never to have seen the Tennant Collection, of which these undoubtedly form part, but as Baron Feuillet de Conches was an expert in deciphering Bonaparte's extraordinary caligraphy, these letters are very useful for reference in helping us to translate some phrases which had been given up as illegible by Mr. Tennant and Sir Walter Scott.

(2nd) The *Collection Didot*. This enormously valuable collection forms by far the greater part of the Letters that we possess of Napoleon to his wife. They are undoubtedly authentic, and have been utilised largely by Aubenas, St. Amand, Masson, and the *Correspondance de Napoléon I*. They were edited by Madame Salvage de Faverolles. As is well known, Sir Walter Scott was very anxious to obtain possession of these letters for his *Life of Napoleon*, and his visit to Paris was partly on this account. In *Archibald Constable and his Literary Correspondents*, edited in 1873 by his son, we find the following:—

"*Letter from Archibald Constable to Sir Walter Scott.*

*August 30, 1825.*

"I have had various conversations with Mr. Thomson on the subject of Napoleon's correspondence with Josephine.

Mr. Thomson communicated with Count Flahault for me in the view of its being published, and whether the letters could not, in the meantime, be rendered accessible. The publication, it seems, under any circumstances, is by no means determined on, but should they be given, the price expected is five thousand guineas, which I should imagine greatly too much. I have an enumeration of the letters, from whence written, &c. I shall subjoin a copy of it."

When they were finally published in 1833, they seem to have been stimulated into existence by publication of the *Mémorial de Saint-Helène*, better known in England as *Las Cases*. Doubtless Hortense only allowed such letters to be published as would not injure the reputation of her mother or her relations. In the Preface it is stated: "We think that these letters will afford an interest as important as delightful. Everything that comes from Napoleon, and everything that appertains to him, will always excite the lively attention of contemporaries and posterity. If the lofty meditation of philosophy concerns itself only with the general influence of great men upon their own generation and future ones, a curiosity of another nature, and not less greedy, loves to penetrate into the inmost recesses of their soul, in order to elicit their most secret inclinations. It likes to learn what has been left of the *man*, amid the preoccupations of their projects and the elevation of their fortune. It requires to know in what manner their character has modified their genius, or has been subservient to it.

"It is this curiosity that we hope to satisfy by the publication of these letters. They reveal the inmost thought of Napoleon, they will reflect his earliest impulses, they will

show how the General, the Consul, and the Emperor felt and spoke, not in his discourses or his proclamations—the official garb of his thought—but in the free outpourings of the most passionate or the most tender affections.... This correspondence will prove, we strongly believe, that the conqueror was human, the master of the world a good husband, the great man in fact an excellent man.... We shall see in them how, up to the last moment, he lavished on his wife proofs of his tenderness. Without doubt the letters of the Emperor Napoleon are rarer and shorter than those of the First Consul, and the First Consul writes no longer like General Bonaparte, but everywhere the sentiment is fundamentally the same.

"We make no reflection on the style of these letters, written in haste and in all the *abandon* of intimacy. We can easily perceive they were not destined to see the light. Nevertheless we publish them without changing anything in them."

The *Collection Didot* contains 228 letters from Napoleon to Josephine, and 70 from Josephine to Hortense, and two from Josephine to Napoleon, which seem to be the only two in existence of Josephine to Napoleon whose authenticity is unquestioned.

(3rd) The fugitive letters are collected from various sources, and their genuineness does not seem to be quite as well proved as those of the Tennant or Didot Series. We have generally taken the *Correspondence of Napoleon I.* as the touchstone of their merit to be inserted here, although one of them—that republished from *Las Cases* (No. 85, Series G.)—is manifestly mainly the work of that versatile

author, who is utterly unreliable except when confirmed by others. As Lord Rosebery has well said, the book is "an arsenal of spurious documents."

We have relegated to an Appendix those published by Madame Ducrest, as transparent forgeries, and have to acknowledge with thanks a letter from M. Masson on this subject which thoroughly confirms these views. There seems some reason to doubt No. I., Series E, but being in the *Correspondence*, I have translated it.

The *Correspondence of Napoleon I.* is a splendid monument to the memory of Napoleon. It is alluded to throughout the Notes as *The Correspondence*, and it deserves special recognition here. Its compilation was decreed by Napoleon III. from Boulogne, on 7th September 1854, and the first volume appeared in 1858, and the last in 1870. With the first volume is inserted the Report of the Commission to the Emperor, part of which we subjoin:—

*"Report of the Commission to the Emperor.*

"Sire,—Augustus numbered Cæsar among the gods, and dedicated to him a temple; the temple has disappeared, the Commentaries remain. Your Majesty, wishing to raise to the chief of your dynasty an imperishable monument, has ordered us to gather together and publish the political, military, and administrative correspondence of Napoleon I. It has realised that the most conspicuous (*éclatant*) homage to render to this incomparable genius was to make him known in his entirety. No one is ignorant of his victories, of the laws with which he has endowed our country, the institutions that he has founded and which dwell immovable

after so many revolutions; his prosperity and his reverses are in every mouth; history has recounted what he has done, but it has not always known his designs: it has not had the secret of so many admirable combinations that have been the spoil of fortune (*que la fortune a déjouées*), and so many grand projects for the execution of which time alone was wanting. The traces of Napoleon's thoughts were scattered; it was necessary to reunite them and to give them to the light.

"Such is the task which your Majesty confided to us, and of which we were far from suspecting the extent. The thousands of letters which were received from all parts have allowed us to follow, in spite of a few regrettable *lacunæ*, the thoughts of Napoleon day by day, and to assist, so to say, at the birth of his projects, at the ceaseless workings of his mind, which knew no other rest than change of occupation. But what is perhaps most surprising in the reading of a correspondence so varied, is the power of that universal intelligence from which nothing escaped, which in turn raised itself without an effort to the most sublime conceptions, and which descends with the same facility to the smallest details.... Nothing seems to him unworthy of his attention that has to do with the realisation of his designs; and it is not sufficient for him to give the most precise orders, but he superintends himself the execution of them with an indefatigable perseverance.

"The letters of Napoleon can add nothing to his glory, but they better enable us to comprehend his prodigious destiny, the prestige that he exercised over his contemporaries—'le culte universel dont sa mémoire est l'objet, enfin,

l'entraînement irrésistible par lequel la France a replacé sa dynastie au sommet de l'édifice qu'il avait construit.'

"These letters also contain the most fruitful sources of information ... for peoples as for governments; for soldiers and for statesmen no less than for historians. Perhaps some persons, greedy of knowing the least details concerning the intimate life of great men, will regret that we have not reproduced those letters which, published elsewhere for the most part, have only dealt with family affairs and domestic relations. Collected together by us as well as the others, they have not found a place in the plan of which your Majesty has fixed for us the limits.

"Let us haste to declare that, in conformity with the express intentions of your Majesty, we have scrupulously avoided, in the reproduction of the letters of the Emperor, any alteration, curtailment, or modification of the text. Sometimes, thinking of the legitimate sorrow which blame from so high a quarter may cause, we have regretted not to be able to soften the vigorous judgment of Napoleon on many of his contemporaries, but it was not our province to discuss them, still less to explain them; but if, better informed or calmer, the Emperor has rendered justice to those of his servants that he had for a moment misunderstood, we have been glad to indicate that these severe words have been followed by reparation.

"We have found it necessary to have the spelling of names of places and of persons frequently altered, but we have allowed to remain slight incorrectnesses of language which denote the impetuosity of composition, and which often could not be rectified without weakening the



originality of an energetic style running right to its object, brief and precise as the words of command. Some concise notes necessary for clearing up obscure passages are the sole conditions which we have allowed ourselves....

"The Commission has decided in favour of chronological order throughout. It is, moreover, the only one which can reproduce faithfully the sequence of the Emperor's thoughts. It is also the best for putting in relief his universal aptitude and his marvellous fecundity.

"Napoleon wrote little with his own hand; nearly all the items of his correspondence were dictated to his secretaries, to his aides-de-camp and his chief of staff, or to his ministers. Thus the Commission has not hesitated to comprise in this collection a great number of items which, although bearing another signature, evidently emanate from Napoleon....

"By declaring that his public life dated from the siege of Toulon, Napoleon has himself determined the point of departure which the Commission should choose. It is from this immortal date that commences the present publication.

"(Signed) The Members of the Commission.

*"Paris, January 20, 1858."*

Contemporary Sources.—It is a commonplace that the history of Napoleon has yet to be written. His contemporaries were stunned or overwhelmed by the whirlwind of his glory; the next generation was blinded by meteoric fragments of his "system," which glowed with impotent heat as they fell through an alien atmosphere into

oblivion. Such were the Bourriennes, the Jominis, the Talleyrands, and other traitors of that ilk. But

"The tumult and the shouting dies;  
The captains and the kings depart;"

and now, when all the lesser tumults and lesser men *have* passed away, each new century will, as Lockhart foretold, "inscribe one mighty era with the majestic name of Napoleon." And yet the writings of no contemporary can be ignored; neither Alison nor Scott, certainly not Bignon, Montgaillard, Pelet, Mathieu Dumas, and Pasquier. Constant, Bausset, Méneval, Rovigo, and D'Abrantès are full of interest for their personal details, and D'Avrillon, Las Cases, Marmont, Marbot, and Lejeune only a degree less so. Jung's *Memoirs of Lucien* are invaluable, and those of Joseph and Louis Bonaparte useful. But the *Correspondence* is worth everything else, including Panckouke (1796-99), where, in spite of shocking arrangement, print, and paper, we get the replies as well as the letters. The *Biographie Universelle Michaud* is hostile, except the interesting footnotes of Bégin. It must, however, be read. The article in the *Encyclopædia Britannica* was the work of an avowed enemy of the Napoleonic system, the editor of the *Life and Times of Stein*.

For the Diary, the *Revue Chronologique de l'Histoire de France* or Montgaillard (1823) has been heavily drawn upon, especially for the later years, but wherever practicable the dates have been verified from the *Correspondence* and bulletins of the day. On the whole, the records of respective losses in the battles are slightly favourable to the French, as their figures have been usually taken; always, however, the

maximum French loss and the minimum of the allies is recorded, when unverified from other sources.

The late Professor Seeley, in his monograph, asserts that Napoleon, tried by his plan, is a failure—that even before death his words and actions merited no monument. We must seek, however, for the mightiest heritage of Napoleon in his brainchildren of the second generation, the Genii of the Code.

The Code Napoleon claims to-day its two hundred million subjects. "The Law should be clean, precise, uniform; to interpret is to corrupt it." So ruled the Emperor; and now, a century later, Archbishop Temple (born in one distant island the year Napoleon died in another) bears testimony to the beneficent sway of Napoleon's Word-Empire. Criticising English legal phraseology, the Archbishop of Canterbury said, "The French Code is always welcome in every country where it has been introduced; and where people have once got hold of it, they are unwilling to have it changed for any other, because it is *a marvel of clearness*." Surely if ever Style *is* the Man, it is Napoleon, otherwise the inspection of over seven million words, as marshalled forth in his *Correspondence*, would not only confuse but confound. As it is, its "hum of armies, gathering rank on rank," has left behind what Bacon calls a conflation of sound, from which, however, as from Kipling's steel-sinewed symphony,

"The clanging chorus goes—  
Law, Order, Duty and Restraint, Obedience,  
Discipline."

# NAPOLEON'S LETTERS

## SERIES A

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(1796)

*February 23rd.—Bonaparte made Commander-in-Chief of the Army of Italy.*

No. 1.

*Seven o'clock in the morning.*

My waking thoughts are all of thee. Your portrait and the remembrance of last night's delirium have robbed my senses of repose. Sweet and incomparable Josephine, what an extraordinary influence you have over my heart. Are you vexed? do I see you sad? are you ill at ease? My soul is broken with grief, and there is no rest for your lover. But is there more for me when, delivering ourselves up to the deep feelings which master me, I breathe out upon your lips, upon your heart, a flame which burns me up—ah, it was this past night I realised that your portrait was not you. You start at noon; I shall see you in three hours. Meanwhile, *mio dolce amor*, accept a thousand kisses,<sup>14</sup> but give me none, for they fire my blood.

N. B.

*A Madame Beauharnais.*

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*March 9th.—Bonaparte marries Josephine.*

*March 11th.—Bonaparte leaves Paris to join his army.*

No. 2.

*Chanceaux Post House,*

*March 14, 1796.*

I wrote you at Chatillon, and sent you a power of attorney to enable you to receive various sums of money in course of remittance to me. Every moment separates me further from you, my beloved, and every moment I have less energy to exist so far from you. You are the constant object of my thoughts; I exhaust my imagination in thinking of what you are doing. If I see you unhappy, my heart is torn, and my grief grows greater. If you are gay and lively among your friends (male and female), I reproach you with having so soon forgotten the sorrowful separation three days ago; thence you must be fickle, and henceforward stirred by no deep emotions. So you see I am not easy to satisfy; but, my dear, I have quite different sensations when I fear that your health may be affected, or that you have cause to be annoyed; then I regret the haste with which I was separated from my darling. I feel, in fact, that your natural kindness of heart exists no longer for me, and it is only when I am quite sure you are not vexed that I am satisfied. If I were asked how I slept, I feel that before replying I should have to get a message to tell me that you had had a good night. The ailments, the passions of men influence me only when I imagine they may reach you, my dear. May my good genius,

which has always preserved me in the midst of great dangers, surround you, enfold you, while I will face my fate unguarded. Ah! be not gay, but a trifle melancholy; and especially may your soul be free from worries, as your body from illness: you know what our good Ossian says on this subject. Write me, dear, and at full length, and accept the thousand and one kisses of your most devoted and faithful friend.

[This letter is translated from St. Amand's *La Citoyenne Bonaparte*, p. 3, 1892.]

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*March 27th.—Arrival at Nice and proclamation to the soldiers.*

No. 3.

*April 3rd.—He is at Mentone.*

*Port Maurice, April 3rd.*

I have received all your letters, but none has affected me like the last. How can you think, my charmer, of writing me in such terms? Do you believe that my position is not already painful enough without further increasing my regrets and subverting my reason. What eloquence, what feelings you portray; they are of fire, they inflame my poor heart! My unique Josephine, away from you there is no more joy—away from thee the world is a wilderness, in which I stand alone, and without experiencing the bliss of unburdening my soul. You have robbed me of more than my soul; you are the one only thought of my life. When I am