

Hertzberg's Napoleonana

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A synthesis of many talents and great names is represented in the copy of William Sloane's *Life of Napoleon Bonaparte* which is housed in the Special Collections Department of the University Library. The interest of this particular set, though, is by no means owing to its text or to the rarity of the book. Indeed, a first edition may today be had for no more than the original 1896 price, while Sloane's scholarship, considered unexceptional at the time, is not now remembered at all. The value of the book is due rather to a commercial bookbinder and admirer of the French Emperor who so transfigured the set as to expand it from four to twelve volumes and earn for it a gold medal at the 1904 Louisiana Purchase Exposition in St. Louis.

Ernest Hertzberg gave two years to rebinding this copy of Sloane's biography, producing, in the hyperbolic language of an advertisement, "the most elaborate and unique set of books in existence." This he accomplished by separating and remounting the leaves of the original publication, inserting some 1,250 illustrations and 45 original letters from his own collection of Napoleonana, then rebinding the whole in dark green levant with gold tooling. Individually boxed, each volume has inside panels, or doublures, of unique design, displaying in gold the Napoleonic insignia. The spines of the third through tenth volumes bear one letter each, so that the set, seen together, spells the Emperor's name. It is a most ornate, perhaps extravagant, example of luxury binding which all but renders the text irrelevant.

Offered for sale at the St. Louis Exposition by the Ringer & Hertzberg Bindery for \$10,000, the set actually sold some time later for \$12,000 and came to The University of Iowa as part of the bequest made by Mrs. Mark Ranney as a memorial to her husband.¹ Now 65

¹ A description of the genesis of the Ranney Memorial Library is given, together with interesting side lights, in Malcolm Glenn Wyer, *Books and People* (Denver, 1934), pp. 52-58.

years old, the binding is only just beginning to show the symptoms of age and may reasonably be expected to depreciate with time. Precisely the opposite is true, however, with respect to the illustrations,² and especially the inserted letters³ which contribute scholarly value to a set whose importance would otherwise be aesthetic only.

Of the several letters addressed to Napoleon, General Grouchy's is perhaps most typical, not only of the collection, but of the sort of routine correspondence which Bonaparte must have had to attend to throughout his reign. The letter is of interest not solely on account of its recipient, however. Grouchy, a veteran commander of the revolutionary wars who received a Marshal's bâton during the Hundred Days, was the commander most blamed for the French disaster at Waterloo, accused by Napoleon (and some writers) of obeying too strictly orders rendered obsolete by events. Here, with remarkable informality, he asks a favor of Bonaparte in an undated letter⁴ written during the Consulate.

To The First Consul
General!

C. Vion, whose brother is already an artillery officer with the Army of the Rhine, intending to serve in the same branch, has directed his studies accordingly, and is prepared to undergo the preliminary examinations. However these are not to take place until the end of the year and by that time he will be 20 years and 2 months old. Since the recent law prevents him from attending the examination for the Polytechnic School, I request you to order that he be examined at once, or allow him to be admitted to the examination at the end of the year, despite the very insignificant difference in age.

My interest in C. Vion is based less upon my solicitude for him than upon his fine qualities, and upon the real misfortune which it would mean for him to forfeit a career which, I have no doubt, he will pursue with distinction.

Emml. Grouchy

It is revealing to compare the style of address in this letter to that employed by other correspondents both earlier and later, for the evo-

² These illustrations, many of them difficult to obtain elsewhere, give examples of reproduction from copper and steel plates, lithographs, wood-cut etchings, photogravures, and hand-colored pictures. Included are portraits of Napoleon, members of his family, and of virtually every important contemporary.

³ All are manuscript letters, written or dictated by some of the most eminent men of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. In addition to those given here, the collection includes letters from Viscount Castlereagh, von Hardenberg, Marshal Bernadotte (later Charles XIV of Sweden), Robert Peel, Malesherbes, Toussaint L'Ouverture, and Voltaire.

⁴ This and the following letters have been translated from the original French.

lution of this style presents a chronology of the rise and collapse of republicanism in France. The following extract, taken from a letter written by an unidentified correspondent exactly one week before the capture of the Bastille, exemplifies the prolixity to which Louis XVI was accustomed.

Monseigneur

If I have not until now had the honor of writing to your Highness, it was for fear of inconveniencing him in the labors which ceaselessly occupy him; but I have done everything possible to expedite by my efforts the fulfillment of your Highness' requests; with God's aid I have succeeded . . . I venture to assure your Highness, as I have before had the honor of doing, that the service of your August Sovereign and at the same time, the especial esteem which I have for you personally, imposes upon me the duty of sparing neither energy nor time in order to fulfill all his desires to his complete satisfaction.

Bonaparte never required, even as Emperor, such a degree of servility from his courtiers, though a discernible tendency in that direction is obvious as one by one the slogans of Revolution gave way to those of Empire. An example is seen in the letter given below, written by General Dejean, who for eight years served Napoleon as Minister for the Administration of War with the same capability he later demonstrated in the government of Louis XVIII. Théodore de Contamine, the subject of the letter, was an adventurer who shared in some of the period's most crucial battles, most notably Trafalgar, Wagram, and Leipzig. Wounded on at least four occasions, three times taken prisoner, and at last made Viscount by Louis, he typifies that spirit of risk and ambition which characterized Napoleon's France. Future Viscount notwithstanding, Dejean's letter suggests that Contamine was not altogether a man of his word.

Report to the Emperor and King
May 7, 1806

I have the honor of reporting to your Majesty, the Emperor and King, that the Minister of the Navy has received and forwarded to me the complaints of Monsieur de la Solana, governor of Cadiz, concerning the reëntry into France of S. de la Contamine who had been taken prisoner by the English, Oct. 4, 1805.

S. de la Contamine is an officer who previously was in the service of Holland. He was employed by General Lauriston as Adjutant Commander but has not been confirmed in that rank.

M. de la Solana and the English admiral assure us that this officer had received permission to spend one month at Cadiz, on the condition of rejoining the English squadron at the end of that period. It appears,

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on the contrary, that he entered France, and that he even made his appearance before the authorities in order to petition for the confirmation of his rank.

I beg your Majesty to be so kind as to have his intentions made known to me concerning the answer which is to be made to this claim.

For the Minister of War
by the Minister-Director
for the Administration
of War
Dejean

The most notable author of Napoleon's day was François-René Chateaubriand. In 1802 Chateaubriand had published a lengthy tract, *Génie du Christianisme*, which proved enormously influential in re-awakening religious feelings in France when, as a result of the doctrines of the Revolution, such feelings appeared seriously threatened. Chateaubriand, despite his royalism, had rendered an important service to the Usurper by preparing French opinion for Napoleon's Concordat with the Church.

Although Chateaubriand had mixed in politics during the Consulate, his unhappiness with Napoleon's methods kept him from any important post until the Restoration. In the fall of 1822, he was named plenipotentiary to the Congress of Verona and in that capacity undertook the most unworthy act of his career when for reasons wholly Machiavelian he sought and won for France the privilege of extinguishing in Spain a revolution against a corrupt and benighted king. His policy at Verona represents the high-water mark of reaction in nineteenth-century France. On Christmas Day, 1822, Chateaubriand was made Foreign Minister, and it is to this appointment that the letter given here refers. Napoleon had died in exile just twenty months earlier.

Paris Dec. 31, 1822

You've no doubt heard, Monsieur, of my new position before this letter reaches you. I have the honor of sending an account of it to Prince Metternich. Now, Monsieur, you must give me your help. If I have the good favor of the cabinets of Europe my position will be all the stronger for it. The allies have long been unjust towards the Royalists, sometimes viewing us as 13th century barons, sometimes as 19th century liberals. This has done us a great harm. Permit me to be a constitutional Royalist without you alarming yourself. Let neither my direction nor method frighten you. I understand France through and through and I recognize the course which must be pursued in order to arrive at a condition of things which will mean the felicity of my own country and the peace of Europe. You offered me your friendship, Monsieur. I claim that friendship now and the proofs of it will soon be most valuable to

me. You know already the feeling of respect, esteem, and of admiration which I have sworn to you.

Chateaubriand

Of all the Bonapartes, none was more completely involved in (or more harmed by) the political fortunes of the family than Hortense Bonaparte, daughter of Josephine. Stepdaughter of one Emperor, she was to become the mother of another when fifteen years after her death her son came to the throne of France as Napoleon III. Her connections with royalty, however, do not end there. In 1802, at Napoleon's insistence, she married Louis Bonaparte and thereby became Queen of Holland when Louis was made King. Hortense thus was at the same time stepdaughter and sister-in-law to Napoleon. Further, Hortense's eldest son, who was perhaps indeed illegitimate, was believed to have been fathered by Napoleon. This child, Napoleon-Charles, was generally regarded the heir presumptive when Josephine failed to conceive, and Napoleon for a time thought of adopting the boy who, however, died in infancy.

Hortense's marriage was a thoroughly unhappy one, and she evinced always a preference for France to the land over which she had been made to reign. Napoleon steadfastly refused to allow Hortense to divorce his brother, a refusal which, however, did not prevent her from bearing an illegitimate son in 1811. Neither did it discourage her continued devotion to Napoleon. It was Hortense who received Napoleon after Waterloo and who, apparently in preparation for any contingency, had the Emperor carry secretly into exile a necklace worth 800,000 francs, belonging to her. In this letter, concerning some unrevealed transaction, can be seen a residue of the bitterness resulting from her marriage, contracted thirty years earlier.

To Monsieur le Baron Schetzler Bauguier
Augsbourg

I received your letter of the 16th of this month, Monsieur, and it is painfully clear that it will be impossible for me to send the document which you request as soon as required. During the 20 years since I've been separated from my husband I have never needed his consent for any of the transactions which I've made in my name, and I am not therefore provided with it. He granted all such rights to me from the time of the first abdication in Holland and since then I've regulated my own affairs without anyone having demanded that my husband be involved and since I've not been in correspondence with him for a long time I've written my attorney in Paris so that he might send you a court judgement which authorizes me to buy or sell without the concurrence of my husband. I thought this would be entirely sufficient, but

as it has not yet reached me and as it appears that a deed from my husband is absolutely necessary, I am having a request sent to him while regretting that the affair has not been able to proceed as quickly as it should. I depend upon your best efforts to see to it that I suffer no loss.

I have just now located my deed of separate estate with my husband and am having a copy made by the authorities of the country which I will send you by the first post and which permits me every type of transaction without his participation. Accept the assurance of my regards.

Hortense

Arenenberg Oct. 18 1832

Hortense died at age 54 in 1837, about midway between the reigns of the two Napoleons. She had lived early enough to share in the splendor of possibly the mightiest figure in the history of Europe, and late enough to find the glory gone.

Doubly valuable is the set of books, therefore, which in addition to beauty, holds these souvenirs of the age of Napoleon.

moi être Royaliste constitutionnel sans
vous en égarer; ne vous effrayez ni de
ma marche, ni de mon langage. Je connais
la France à fond et je sais la route qu'il faut
prendre pour arriver à un ~~état~~ état de choses,
qui fera le bonheur de mon pays et le repos
de l'Europe. Vos vives prières, Monsieur,
sont bien reçues; je les réclame, et les témoignages
rien seront surtout bien précieux dans ce
moment. Vous connaissez tous les sentiments
d'estime, de considération et d'admiration que
je vous ai voués.

Chateaubriand.

Second page of a holograph letter, dated 31 December 1822, in which Chateaubriand discusses his appointment as Foreign Minister of France. From the Ranney Collection.