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Walter Scott

Excerpt

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THE
L I F E
OF
N A P O L E O N B U O N A P A R T E .

VOL. V.

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OF

NAPOLEON BUONAPARTE.

CHAPTER I.

Different Views entertained by the English Ministers and the Chief Consul of the effects of the Treaty of Amiens.—Napoleon, misled by the Shouts of a London Mob, misunderstands the Feelings of the People of Great Britain.—His continued encroachments on the Independence of Europe—His conduct to Switzerland—Interferes in their Politics, and sets himself up, uninvited, as Mediator in their Concerns—His extraordinary Manifesto addressed to them.—Ney enters Switzerland at the head of 40,000 Men.—The patriot, Reding, disbands his Forces, and is imprisoned.—Switzerland is compelled to furnish France with a Subsidiary Army of 16,000 Troops.—The Chief Consul adopts the title of Grand Mediator of the Helvetic Republic.

THE eyes of Europe were now fixed on Buonaparte, as master of the destinies of the civilized world, which his will could either maintain in a state of general peace, or replunge into all the miseries of

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renewed and more inveterate war. Many hopes were entertained, from his eminent personal qualities, that the course in which he would direct them might prove as honourable to himself as happy for the nations over whom he now possessed such unbounded influence. The shades of his character were either lost amid the lustre of his victories, or excused from the necessity of his situation. The massacre of Jaffa was little known, was acted afar off, and might present itself to memory as an act of military severity, which circumstances might palliate, if not excuse.

Napoleon, supposing him fully satiated with martial glory, in which he had never been surpassed, was expected to apply himself to the arts of peace, by which he might derive fame of a more calm, yet not less honourable character. Peace was all around him, and to preserve it, he had only to will that it should continue; and the season seemed eminently propitious for taking the advice of Cineas to the King of Epirus, and reposing himself after his labours. But he was now beginning to show, that, from the times of Pyrrhus to his own, ambition has taken more pleasure in the hazards and exertions of the chase than in its successful issue. All the power which Buonaparte already possessed seemed only valuable in his eyes, as it afforded him the means of getting as much more; and, like a sanguine and eager gamester, he went on doubling his stakes at every throw, till the tide of

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fortune, which had so long run in his favour, at length turned against him, and his ruin was total. His ruling and predominating vice was ambition—we would have called it his only one, did not ambition, when of a character intensely selfish, include so many others.

It seems the most natural course, in continuing our history, first to trace those events which disappointed the general expectations of Europe, and after a jealous and feverish armistice of little more than a year, again renewed the horrors of war. We shall then resume the internal history of France and her ruler.

Although the two contracting powers had been able to agree upon the special articles of the peace of Amiens, they possessed extremely different ideas concerning the nature of a state of pacification in general, and the relations which it establishes between two independent states. The English minister, a man of the highest personal worth and probity, entertained no doubt that peace was to have its usual effect, of restoring all the ordinary amicable intercourse betwixt France and England; and that, in matters concerning their mutual allies, and the state of the European republic in general, the latter country, on sheathing the sword, had retained the right of friendly counsel and remonstrance. Mr Addington could not hope to restore the balance of Europe, for which so much blood had been spilled in the 18th century.

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The scales and beams of that balance were broken into fragments, and lay under the feet of Buonaparte. But Britain did not lie prostrate. She still grasped in her hand the trident of the Ocean, and had by no event, in the late contest, been reduced to surrender the right of remonstrating against violence and injustice, and of protecting the feeble, as far as circumstances would still permit.

But Buonaparte's idea of the effects of the treaty of Amiens was very different. It was, according to his estimation, a treaty, containing everything that Britain was entitled to expect on the part of herself and her allies, and the accepting of which excluded her from all farther right of interference in the affairs of Europe. It was like a bounding charter, which restricts the right of the person to whom it is granted to the precise limits therein described, and precludes the possibility of his making either claim or acquisition beyond them. All Europe, then, was to be at the disposal of France, and states created, dissolved, changed, and re-changed at her pleasure, unless England could lay her finger on the line in the treaty of Amiens, which prohibited the proposed measure. "England," said the *Moniteur*, in an official tone, "shall have the treaty of Amiens, the whole treaty of Amiens, and nothing but the treaty of Amiens!" In this manner the treaty was, so far as England was concerned, understood to decide,

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and that in favour of France, all questions which could possibly arise in the course of future time between the two countries; while, in ordinary candour, and in common sense, it could be only considered as settling the causes of animosity between the parties, as they existed at the date of the pacification.

The insular situation of England was absurdly alleged as a reason why she should not interfere in continental politics; as if the relations of states to each other were not the same, whether divided by an ocean or a line of mountains. The very circumstance had been founded upon eloquently and justly by one of her own poets, for claiming for Britain the office of an umpire,* because less liable to be agitated by the near vicinity of continental war, and more likely to decide with impartiality concerning contending claims, in which she herself could have little interest. It was used by France in the sense of another poet, and made a reason for thrusting England out of the European world, and allowing her no vote in its most important concerns.†

To such humiliation it was impossible for Britain to submit. It rendered the treaty of Amiens, thus

“ Thrice happy Britain, from the kingdoms rent,
To sit the Guardian of the Continent.”

ADDISON.

† “ ——— penitus toto divisos orbe Britannos.”

VIRGIL.

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interpreted, the counterpart of the terms which the Cyclops granted to Ulysses, that he should be the last devoured. If Britain were compelled to remain, with fettered hands and padlocked lips, a helpless and inactive witness, while France completed the subjection of the Continent, what other doom could she expect than to be finally subdued? It will be seen afterwards that disputes arose concerning the execution of the treaty. These, it is possible, might have been accommodated, had not the general interpretation, placed by the First Consul on the whole transaction, been inconsistent with the honour, safety, and independence of Great Britain.

It seems more than probable, that the extreme rejoicing of the rabble of London at signing the preliminaries, their dragging about the carriage of Lauriston, and shouting "Buonaparte for ever!" had misled the ruler of France into an opinion that peace was indispensably necessary to England; for, like other foreigners, misapprehending the nature of our popular government, he may easily enough have mistaken the cries of a London mob for the voice of the British people. The ministers also seemed to keep their ground in Parliament on condition of their making and maintaining peace; and as they showed a spirit of frankness and concession, it might be misconstrued by Buonaparte into a sense of weakness. Had he not laboured under some such impression, he

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would probably have postponed, till the final pacification of Amiens, the gigantic steps towards farther aggrandizement, which he hesitated not to take after signing the preliminaries, and during the progress of the Congress.

We have specified, in the last volume, Napoleon's acceptance of the Presidency of the Cisalpine Republic, on which he now bestowed the name of Italian, as if it was designed at a future time to comprehend the whole peninsula of Italy. By a secret treaty with Portugal, he had acquired the province of Guiana, so far as it belonged to that power. By another with Spain, he had engrossed the Spanish part of Louisiana, and, what was still more ominous, the reversion of the Duchy of Parma, and of the island of Elba, important as an excellent naval station.

In the German Diet for settling the indemnities, to be granted to the various princes of the empire who had sustained loss of territory in consequence of late events, and particularly of the treaty of Luneville, the influence of France predominated in a manner which threatened entire destruction to that ancient Confederation. It may be in general observed, that towns, districts, and provinces, were dealt from hand to hand like cards at a gaming-table; and the powers of Europe once more, after the partition of Poland, saw with scandal the government of freemen transferred from hand to hand, without regard to their

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wishes, aptitudes, and habits, any more than those of cattle. This evil imitation of an evil precedent was fraught with mischief, as breaking every tie of affection betwixt the governor and governed, and loosening all attachments which bind subjects to their rulers, excepting those springing from force on the one side, and necessity on the other.

In this transfer of territories and jurisdictions, the King of Prussia obtained a valuable compensation for the Duchy of Cleves, and other provinces transferred to France, as lying on the left bank of the Rhine. The neutrality of that monarch had been of the last service to France during her late bloody campaigns, and was now to be compensated. The smaller princes of the Empire, especially those on the right bank of the Rhine, who had virtually placed themselves under the patronage of France, were also gratified with large allotments of territory; whilst Austria, whose pertinacious opposition was well remembered, was considered as yet retaining too high pretensions to power and independence, and her indemnities were as much limited as those of the friends of France were extended.

The various advantages and accessions of power and influence which we have hitherto alluded to, as attained by France, were chiefly gained by address in treating, and diplomatic skill. But shortly after the treaty of Amiens had been signed, Buonaparte

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manifested to the world, that where intrigue was unsuccessful, his sword was as ready as ever to support and extend his aggressions.

The attack of the Directory on the Swiss Cantons had been always considered as a coarse and gross violation of the law of nations, and was regarded as such by Buonaparte himself. But he failed not to maintain the military possession of Switzerland by the French troops; nor, however indignant under the downfall of her ancient fame and present liberties, was it possible for that country to offer any resistance, without the certainty of total destruction.

The eleventh article of the treaty of Luneville, seemed to afford the Swiss a prospect of escaping from this thralldom, but it was in words only. That treaty was declared to extend to the Batavian, Helvetic, Cisalpine, and Ligurian Republics. "The contracting parties guarantee the *independence* of the said republics," continues the treaty, "and the right of the people who inhabit them to adopt what form of government they please." We have seen how far the Cisalpine Republic profited by this declaration of independence; the proceedings respecting Switzerland were much more glaring.

There was a political difference of opinion in the Swiss cantons, concerning the form of government to be adopted by them; and the question was solemnly