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Walter Scott

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THE
LIFE
OF
NAPOLEON BUONAPARTE.

VOL. VII

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CHAPTER I.

Change which took place in Napoleon's Domestic Life, after the Peace of Vienna—Causes which led to it—His anxiety for an Heir—A Son of his brother Louis is fixed upon, but dies in Childhood.—Character and Influence of Josephine—Strong mutual attachment betwixt her and Napoleon.—Fouché opens to Josephine the Plan of a Divorce—her extreme Distress.—On 5th December, Napoleon announces her Fate to Josephine—On 15th they are formally separated before the Imperial Council—Josephine retaining the rank of Empress for life.—Espousals of Buonaparte and Maria Louisa of Austria take place at Vienna, 11th March 1810.—Comparison, and Contrast, betwixt Josephine and her Successor.—The Results of this Union different from what was expected.—Foreseen by the Emperor Alexander.

THERE is perhaps no part of the varied life of the wonderful person of whom we treat, more deeply interesting, than the change which took place in his

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domestic establishment, shortly after the peace of Vienna. The main causes of that change are strongly rooted in human nature, but there were others which arose out of Napoleon's peculiar situation. The desire of posterity—of being represented long after our own earthly career is over, by those who derive their life and condition in society from us, is deeply rooted in our species. In all ages and countries, children are accounted a blessing, barrenness a misfortune at least, if not a curse. This desire of maintaining a posthumous connexion with the world, through the medium of our descendants, is increased, when there is property or rank to be inherited; and, however vain the thought, there are few to which men cling with such sincere fondness, as the prospect of bequeathing to their children's children the fortunes they have inherited from their fathers, or acquired by their own industry. There is kindness as well as some vanity in the feeling; for the attachment which we bear to the children whom we see and love, naturally flows downward to their lineage, whom we may never see. The love of distant posterity is in some degree the metaphysics of natural affection.

It was impossible that the founder of so vast an empire as that of Napoleon, could be insensible to a feeling which is so deeply grafted in our nature, as to influence the most petty proprietor of a house and a few acres—it is of a character to be felt in propor-

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tion to the extent of the inheritance ; and so viewed, there never existed in the world before, and, it is devoutly to be hoped, will never be again permitted by Providence to arise, a power so extensive, so formidable as Napoleon's. Immense as it was, it had been, moreover, the work of his own talents ; and, therefore, he must have anticipated, with the greater pain, that the system perfected by so much labour and blood, should fall to pieces on the death of him by whom it had been erected, or that the reins of empire should be grasped after that event " by some unlineal hand,"

" No son of his succeeding."

The drop of gall, which the poet describes so naturally as embittering the cup of the Usurper of Scotland, infused, there is no doubt, its full bitterness into that of Napoleon.

The sterility of the Empress Josephine was now rendered, by the course of nature, an irremediable evil, over which she mourned in hopeless distress ; and conscious on what precarious circumstances the continuance of their union seemed now to depend, she gave way occasionally to fits of jealousy, less excited, according to Napoleon, by personal attachment, than by suspicion that her influence over her husband's mind might be diminished, in case of his having offspring by some paramour.

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She turned her thoughts to seek a remedy, and exerted her influence over her husband, to induce him to declare some one his successor, according to the unlimited powers vested in him by the Imperial constitution. In the selection, she naturally endeavoured to direct his choice towards his step-son, Eugene Beauharnois, her own son by her first marriage ; but this did not meet Buonaparte's approbation. A child, the son of his brother Louis, by Hortense Beauharnois, appeared, during its brief existence, more likely to become the destined heir of this immense inheritance. Napoleon seemed attached to the boy ; and when he manifested any spark of childish spirit, rejoiced in the sound of the drum, or showed pleasure in looking upon arms and the image of war, he is said to have exclaimed,—“ *There* is a child fit to succeed, perhaps to surpass me.”

The fixing his choice on an heir so intimately connected with herself, would have secured the influence of Josephine, as much as it could receive assurance from anything save bearing her husband issue herself ; but she was not long permitted to enjoy this prospect. The son of Louis and Hortense died of a disorder incident to childhood ; and thus was broken, while yet a twig, the shoot, that, growing to maturity, might have been reckoned on as the stay of an empire. Napoleon showed the deepest grief, but Josephine sorrowed as one who had no hope.

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Yet, setting aside her having the misfortune to bear him no issue, the claims of Josephine on her husband's affections were as numerous as could be possessed by a wife. She had shared his more lowly fortunes, and, by her management and address during his absence in Egypt, had paved the way for the splendid success which he had attained on his return. She had also done much to render his government popular, by softening the sudden and fierce bursts of passion to which his temperament induced him to give way. No one could understand, like Josephine, the peculiarities of her husband's temper,—no one dared, like her, to encounter his displeasure, rather than not advise him for his better interest,—no one could possess such opportunities of watching the fit season for intercession,—and no one, it is allowed on all hands, made a more prudent, or a more beneficent use of the opportunities she enjoyed. The character of Buonaparte, vehement by temper, a soldier by education, and invested by Fortune with the most despotic power, required peculiarly the moderating influence of such a mind, which could interfere without intrusion, and remonstrate without offence.

To maintain this influence over her husband, Josephine made not only unreluctantly, but eagerly, the greatest personal sacrifices. In all the rapid

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journeys which he performed, she was his companion. No obstacle of road or weather was permitted to interfere with her departure. However sudden the call, the Empress was ever ready ; however untimely the hour, her carriage was in instant attendance. The influence which she maintained by the sacrifice of her personal comforts, was used for the advancement of her husband's best interests,—the relief of those who were in distress, and the averting the consequences of hasty resolutions, formed in a moment of violence or irritation.

Besides her considerable talents, and her real beneficence of disposition, Josephine was possessed of other ties over the mind of her husband. The mutual passion which had subsisted between them for many years, if its warmth had subsided, seems to have left behind affectionate remembrances and mutual esteem. The grace and dignity with which Josephine played her part in the Imperial pageant, was calculated to gratify the pride of Napoleon, which might have been shocked at seeing the character of Empress discharged with less ease and adroitness ; for her temper and manners enabled her, as one early accustomed to the society of persons of political influence, to conduct herself with singular dexterity in the intrigues of the splendid and busy court, where she filled so important a character. Lastly, it is certain

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that Buonaparte, who, like many of those that affect to despise superstition, had a reserve of it in his own bosom, believed that his fortunes were indissolubly connected with those of Josephine ; and loving her as she deserved to be beloved, he held his union with her the more intimate, that there was attached to it, he thought, a spell affecting his own destinies, which had ever seemed most predominant when they had received the recent influence of Josephine's presence.

Notwithstanding all these mutual ties, it was evident to the politicians of the Tuilleries, that whatever attachment and veneration for the Empress Napoleon might profess and feel, it was likely in the long-run to give way to the eager desire of a lineal succession, to which he might bequeath his splendid inheritance. As age advanced, every year weakened, though in an imperceptible degree, the influence of the Empress, and must have rendered more eager the desire of her husband to form a new alliance, while he was yet at a period of life enabling him to hope he might live to train to maturity the expected heir.

Fouché, the Minister of Police, the boldest political intriguer of his time, discovered speedily to what point the Emperor must ultimately arrive, and seems to have meditated the insuring his own power and continuance in favour, by taking the

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initiative in a measure, in which, perhaps, Napoleon might be ashamed to break the ice in person. Sounding artfully his master's disposition, Fouché was able to discover that the Emperor was struggling betwixt the supposed political advantages to be derived from a new matrimonial union on the one hand, and, on the other, love for his present consort, habits of society which particularly attached him to Josephine, and the species of superstition which we have already noticed. Having been able to conjecture the state of the Emperor's inclinations, the crafty councillor determined to make Josephine herself the medium of suggesting to Buonaparte the measure of her own divorce, and his second marriage, as a sacrifice necessary to consolidate the empire, and complete the happiness of the Emperor.

One evening at Fontainebleau, as the Empress was returning from mass, Fouché detained her in the embrasure of a window in the gallery, while, with an audacity almost incomprehensible, he explained, with all the alleviating qualifications his ingenuity could suggest, the necessity of a sacrifice, which he represented as equally sublime and inevitable. The tears gathered in Josephine's eyes—her colour came and went—her lips swelled—and the least which the councillor had to fear, was his advice having brought on a severe nervous affection. She commanded her emotions, however, sufficiently

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to ask Fouché, with a faltering voice, whether he had any commission to hold such language to her. He replied in the negative, and said that he had only ventured on such an insinuation from his having predicted with certainty what must necessarily come to pass; and from his desire to turn her attention to what so nearly concerned her glory and happiness.

In consequence of this interview, an impassioned and interesting scene is said to have taken place betwixt Buonaparte and his consort, in which he naturally and truly disavowed the communication of Fouché, and attempted by every means in his power to dispel her apprehensions. But he refused to dismiss Fouché, when she demanded it as the punishment due to that minister's audacity, in tampering with her feelings; and this refusal alone might have convinced Josephine, that though ancient habitual affection might for a time maintain its influence in the nuptial chamber, it must at length give way before the suggestions of political interest, which were sure to predominate in the cabinet. In fact, when the idea had once been started, the chief objection was removed, and Buonaparte, being spared the pain of directly communicating the unkind and ungrateful proposal to Josephine, had now only to afford her time to familiarize herself with the idea of a divorce, as that which political combinations rendered inevitable.