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Edited by D. A. Bingham

Excerpt

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# THE CORRESPONDENCE OF NAPOLEON.

## CHAPTER I.

THE YEAR 1803.

THE principal event of this year was undoubtedly the rupture of the treaty of Amiens—a treaty which had been hailed with such delight on both sides of the Channel, but which, thanks to the restless ambition of Bonaparte, was never more than a truce. Immediately after the rupture the “army of England” was reorganised, six large camps were formed along the coasts of France and Holland, and active preparations were made for the invasion of England. It is still a moot point whether Bonaparte ever really intended to cross the Channel, although he had medals struck in commemoration of the conquest of Great Britain, and had caused a report to be made of the treasures he would be likely to find in Oxford, which ancient seat of learning was to be pillaged as the chief towns of Italy had been pillaged. In making this grand display, he flattered the feeling of antipathy of the French nation against England, who was accused of having broken the treaty; he was furnished with an excuse for asking for more conscripts and for maintaining an enormous army which kept England in a fever of apprehension, and drained her resources.

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## 2 THE CORRESPONDENCE OF NAPOLEON.

But would Bonaparte have ventured across the Channel in spite of the remonstrances of his admirals, of Ganteaume, of Bruix, of Decrès, and of Villeneuve? Would he have risked so dangerous an operation, leaving behind him Austria, Russia, and Italy, which would soon have taken advantage of his absence, and Spain, Portugal and Switzerland, which would have seized the opportunity to break their fetters? Perhaps if the British fleet had been annihilated, Bonaparte might have carried out his threats; he knew that his lust for universal dominion would never be satisfied until Carthage had been destroyed. With England in his grasp, the Continent was his, and, as he expressed it himself, he would be able to garrison Strasburg with old women. It was his invariable custom, however, to keep several irons in the fire at the same time, and then, when a propitious moment arrived, to adopt one out of several schemes all worked out beforehand. It was therefore impossible to know where he really intended to strike, and difficult to say now what portion of his policy was feigned, and what portion was real. All we know for certain is that the blow which was apparently aimed at England eventually fell upon Austria.

On the rupture of the treaty of Amiens, Bonaparte, contrary to the law of nations, had all the English travelling upon the Continent arrested. The *Annual Register* sets down their number at 11,000, and says that "the great consul, like a politic shepherd, continued removing the pen of his bleating English flock from spot to spot, well knowing that the soil will be everywhere enriched by their temporary residence."

In the month of May, Nelson sailed in the *Victory* to take command of the Mediterranean squadron.

In the month of June we see that the poor King of Etruria, who had been so terribly ill treated by Bonaparte, died. He was buried with great splendour at Florence; his funeral is said to have cost 300,000 livres; two gold medals of great value were placed in his coffin; the

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## BONAPARTE AND INDIA.

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buckles of his shoes were richly set in brilliants, and he had on his finger a costly diamond ring.

Before the end of the year, St. Lucia, Tobago, Demerara, and Esequibo fell into our hands, and the position of the French in St. Domingo became untenable, what with yellow fever and the determination of the blacks to revenge the fate of Toussaint Louverture.

## TO REAR-ADMIRAL DECRES.

“ST. CLOUD, *15th January*, 1803.

“ . . . . The Captain-General (of East Indian possessions) will arrive in a country where our rivals dominate. . . . He must not give them any subject for alarm. He must confine himself to indispensable negotiations, and in his relations with the people and princes, who support with impatience the English yoke, he must carefully avoid causing uneasiness. They are the tyrants of India ; they are suspicious and jealous ; the Captain-General must act with gentleness, dissimulation, and simplicity. Six months after his arrival in India he must furnish me with full details of the situation, the feelings of the various peoples of India, and the strength of the different English establishments. He must make known his views, and what hope there would be of obtaining support in the event of war. . . . He must pay the greatest attention to every phrase, as they will all be weighed, and as they may determine the decision of the government.”

After examining rather superficially the prospect of being able to undertake a campaign in India, Bonaparte terminated his letter thus—

“But the First Consul, well informed by the Captain-General, and aided by the punctual execution of his instructions, may some day place him in the position of acquiring that great glory which causes the memory of man to last beyond the duration of ages.

“BONAPARTE.”

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No doubt, had a favourable opportunity occurred, Bonaparte would not have treated his Captain-General as the Bourbons treated Dupleix, Labourdonnais, and Lally.

On the 16th January, the weather being very severe, Bonaparte ordered 5,000 francs to be sent to the Bishop of Arras for the poor of his diocese. The same day the Minister of Finance was directed to pay to Madame d'Orleans the sum of 100,000 francs in addition to the ordinary 100,000. This money was to be remitted secretly.

Madame d'Orleans was an amiable woman better known as Madame de Montesson. After the death of her first husband she had been secretly married to the Duke of Orleans. During the Revolution she had been thrown into prison where she had made the acquaintance and acquired the friendship of Josephine de Beauharnais, which was the real cause of her favour with Bonaparte.

On the 20th February, 1803, Bonaparte addressed a long message to the Chambers. Referring to the Concordat, he said,

“The principles of our enlightened religion, the voice of the sovereign Pontiff, and the firmness of the government, have triumphed over all obstacles. Mutual sacrifices have reunited the ministers of the gospel; *the Gallican Church* is restored, thanks to intelligence and concord; there is already a happy change in public morality; children listen with more docility to the voice of their parents; youth is more submissive to the authority of the magistrate, *and the conscription is now effected in places where its very name used to arouse resistance.*”

After drawing a brilliant picture of domestic prosperity, Bonaparte added—

“The Isle of Elba has been ceded to France; it brings her a mild and industrious population, two superb harbours and a rich mine; but, separated from France, it could not be intimately connected with any of her departments, nor subjected to the ordinary administrative regulations. . . .

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## MESSAGE TO THE CHAMBERS.

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“The abdication of the sovereign, the wishes of the people, the necessity of things have placed Piedmont in the power of France. In the midst of the nations which surrounded her she could not support the weight of her own independence nor the expenses of a monarchy. United to France she will enjoy, &c., &c.

“Old means of communication have been repaired, and new ones constructed. The Simplon, the Mount Cenis, and the Mount Geneva, will soon open up a triple and easy access to Italy; a high road will run from Genoa to Marseilles, &c.

“The islands of Martinique, Tobago, and St. Lucia, have been restored to us with all their old elements of prosperity. Guadeloupe has been reconquered and pacified. Guiana is increasing in importance. St. Domingo has been subdued, and the author of its troubles is in the power of France. . . .”

But yellow fever came and decimated the French hosts, and the “gallant blacks,” infuriated by the perfidious treatment of Toussaint Louverture, once more resumed the offensive.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> The treatment of Toussaint Louverture and the blacks of St. Domingo is one of the darkest pages of French history. That the “rebel” leader was himself basely betrayed is proved by the following letter from General Rochambeau:

“HEAD-QUARTERS, *8th May*, 1802.

“. . . I informed Toussaint that if he would repair to the Cape pardon might yet be extended to him. He did not hesitate—came to me, implored pardon, and promised fidelity to France. I accepted his submission. . . .”

The greatest horrors ensued. The whites erected a gallows on one hill, the blacks upon another, and hourly executions took place in sight of each other. The French bayoneted and poisoned the blacks by thousands, and, renewing one of the terrible episodes of the Revolution, sent four hundred prisoners to sea in an old vessel, in the hold of which they were stifled with brimstone. The ship was then scuttled. The blacks retaliated by drawing the eyes out of Frenchmen with corkscrews, and similar cruelties.

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6 THE CORRESPONDENCE OF NAPOLEON.

“A French ambassador is at Constantinople with orders to strengthen the bonds that attach us to a *seemingly tottering power* which it is our interest to support and place on a solid basis.

“British troops still occupy Alexandria and Malta; the government would be justified in complaining of this, but it has learned that the vessels which are to take them home are in the Mediterranean.”

Bonaparte then expressed his want of confidence in England, and said that the Republic, as a measure of prudence, had 500,000 *men ready to defend and to avenge it*. “Strange necessity which miserable passions impose upon two nations attached to peace by an equal interest.”

This message touched upon several of the questions which led to the rupture of the treaty of Amiens, the signature of which had been hailed with such unfeigned delight by the people on both sides of the Channel just a year before. It referred to the acquisition of the Isle of Elba which had been evacuated by England; to the annexation of Piedmont; to the establishment of France in Switzerland; to the mission of Sebastiani to Constantinople, Egypt, Palestine, &c., on commercial affairs! and, finally, to those armaments along the French, Belgian, and Dutch coasts which had commenced to inspire alarm and distrust even in the breast of Mr. Addington. The fact of Bonaparte publicly declaring that he had 500,000 men ready to avenge himself on a nation with which he was at peace, was a statement too bold and too menacing to be lightly explained away.

TO BRIGADIER COLBERT.

“PARIS, 15th March, 1803.

“You will go to Russia and hand the inclosed letter to the Emperor. You will talk to him of the esteem enjoyed by Russians in Paris. . . . You will discuss liberal and philosophical ideas in preference to other subjects, in speaking with his majesty. If you see the Grand Duke

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## RUSSIA AND SPAIN.

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Constantine, tell him that I regret he did not come to Paris. You will speak to the Empress of the pleasure I experienced on seeing her uncle here, and how he amused himself in Paris. . . . *If war with England be spoken about, you will say that the French nation desires nothing better than to measure swords with her, seeing the amount of antipathy which exists.* You will treat the diplomatic body with civility, the English ambassador like the others. You will speak well of the one now in Paris, who is very well known.<sup>1</sup> You will represent the First Consul as very busy tracing canals, establishing manufactures, and settling the details of public instruction. “BONAPARTE.”

The letter to the Emperor of Russia was directed against England, and her refusal to evacuate Malta. Bonaparte declared that he would never consent to such dishonour, that he was resolved to resist the English occupation of that island at no matter what price. Owing to the interest which Alexander was supposed to take in the Order, he was asked to concern himself in this affair. A similar letter was addressed to the King of Prussia.

On the 11th of March, the First Consul addressed a long letter to his faithful ally, the King of Spain, filled with reproaches. As usual his chief grievance bore reference to England. In accordance with treaty the British troops had been withdrawn from Minorca, but he complained that since the evacuation the Spanish Government had not only neglected to fortify a port coveted by England, but had reinstated the officials, owing to whose treason the island had fallen into the hands of the enemy. Bonaparte then complained of the condition into which the Spanish navy had been permitted to fall, adding—

“I beg your Majesty to pardon me for taking so much interest in a matter which specially concerns you ; but

<sup>1</sup> This was Lord Whitworth, who was British ambassador at St. Petersburg when Paul was assassinated, and who had been accused by Bonaparte of complicity in that crime.

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## 8 THE CORRESPONDENCE OF NAPOLEON.

England is not asleep ; she is always on the watch, and will not rest until she has seized upon all the colonies and all the commerce of the world [having just restored Martinique, Tobago, St. Lucia, and Minorca]. France can alone prevent this. . . .

“BONAPARTE.”

## INSTRUCTIONS.

“PARIS, 12th March, 1803.

“General Duroc will repair to Berlin with all diligence, and will hand the inclosed letter to the King of Prussia.” [Letter already referred to.]

After portraying the conduct of England in the darkest colours, the Instructions added—

“Should war take place, the First Consul will be able to appeal to God and man, and nothing shall hinder him from pursuing the British Cabinet wherever its standard may be hoisted. To speak plainly, his intention is, should the British Cabinet persevere, immediately to invade Hanover.”

Bonaparte appeared to suppose that by threatening Hanover the King of Prussia would be induced to persuade England to evacuate Malta.

The Duc de Richelieu having been struck off the list of *émigrés*, asked permission to remain in the service of Russia.

## DECISION.

“PARIS, 27th March, 1803.

“Referred to the Grand Judge in order that he may forward letters of permission to remain in the service of Russia, and remove the sequestration attached to the property.<sup>1</sup>

“BONAPARTE.”

<sup>1</sup> In the Nelson despatches may be found the following letter :—

TO THE RIGHT HON. HENRY ADDINGTON.

“OFF TOULON, 16th July, 1803.

“I send you some papers relative to letters from Odessa, a Russian port in the Black Sea, of which the Duke of Richelieu is governor.

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## THE GOVERNOR OF ODESSA.

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The Duc de Richelieu had been in the Russian service before the breaking out of the French Revolution, and had served under Suwarrow at the siege of Ismail. He afterwards rendered eminent services to both Russia and France—to Russia as Governor of Odessa, where his statue still stands, and where his name is still remembered with gratitude; to France as a minister, by procuring the liberation of the territory in 1818, at an earlier date than that originally fixed by the allies. The chambers voted him 2,000*l.* a year, but the Duke—although his pecuniary circumstances were anything but brilliant—refused to accept the pension. He conceived that he had merely done his duty in exerting his influence with the Emperor Alexandre for the benefit of his native land.

## TO GENERAL BERTHIER.

“PARIS, 31st *March*, 1803.

“I beg you will order Brigadier-General Monnet to go to Flushing, and to assume the command of that town and of the Isle of Walcheren. . . . Order General Belliard to arm the battery opposite Flushing, which protects the entry of the Escant. . . . He must be instructed to assume full authority, and not to allow any interference on the part of the Dutch commandant. . . . This place being common to France and Holland, the intention of the Government is that everything shall be done in the name of France. . . . General Monnet must treat the Batavian inhabitants and troops well, show civility to the officers, and frequently talk to them of the conduct of the English at the Cape. . . .

“BONAPARTE.”

You will know much better than I can tell you how this emigrant duke has been courted by Buonaparte, through his minister in Russia. We must recollect that he is a Frenchman, and his ultimate views probably turn to getting back some of his estates in France. . . . I cannot help thinking that France and Russia understand each other about the Turkish dominions. If so, Egypt will be the price. . . .

“NELSON AND BRONTE.”

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IO THE CORRESPONDENCE OF NAPOLEON.

TO CITIZEN TALLEYRAND.

“PARIS, 9th April, 1803.

“You will find inclosed the nomination of the Cardinal of Lyons to the embassy at Rome. . . . You will inform Citizen Cacault that I have always been satisfied with him, and that if he leaves Rome it is because circumstances oblige me to send a cardinal there. . . .

“BONAPARTE.”

At one moment Bonaparte threatened to send a Protestant ambassador to the Holy See, but at present his uncle, Fesch, was to represent the French Republic. Citizen Cacault, though he had been several times called upon to perform disagreeable duties, had always acted with great personal deference towards the Pope.

On the 23rd April was drawn up the secret convention by which France ceded Louisiana to the United States for the sum of 80,000,000 francs, and certain commercial advantages to be enjoyed by French and Spanish vessels in the ports and cities of the ceded territory.

The money was required for the approaching war with England.

NOTE.

“PARIS, 20th April, 1803.

“The minister will draw up a plan for placing the statue of Charlemagne on the Place de la Concorde, or on the so-called Place Vendôme.

“BONAPARTE.”

Bonaparte had an unbounded admiration for Charlemagne, but no doubt wished that instead of contenting himself with writing the Caroline Books against the worship of images, he had proclaimed himself Pope as well as Emperor. The precedent would have been handy. As for the “so-called Place Vendôme,” where the statue