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Edited by D. A. Bingham

Excerpt

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THE CORRESPONDENCE OF NAPOLEON.

CHAPTER I.

THE YEAR 1810.

THE principal event of 1810 was undoubtedly the marriage of Napoleon with the Archduchess Marie Louise, and it is a curious fact that nearly all the documents connected with this brilliant matrimonial alliance have disappeared from the national archives. While reading the few letters bearing upon this remarkable event it will be well to bear in mind the following facts. Napoleon had long contemplated putting Josephine away: she had borne him no children, and he wished to found a dynasty. He would have been contented to leave the throne to the eldest son of Louis, but the "little Napoleon" died while the Emperor was campaigning in Poland. Shortly afterwards, at Erfurth, Napoleon sounded the Czar with regard to his sister the Grand Duchess Catherine. Alexander, while showing himself favourable to an alliance, said that his father Paul had left the Empress Mother absolute control in such matters, and that in all probability it would be difficult to vanquish her resistance. The Czar expressed himself highly flattered, and hoped that one day it might be possible to arrange this union. As for the Empress, she

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declared that she would sooner see her daughter at the bottom of the Neva than the wife of Napoleon; and for fear the French Emperor might again press his suit she lost no time in wedding the Grand Duchess to the Duke of Oldenburg.

It was not until after the battle of Wagram that the question of a matrimonial alliance with Russia was again mooted. On the 28th December, 1809, Caulaincourt broached the subject of a marriage between the Grand Duchess Anne, the sister of the Grand Duchess Catherine, and Napoleon. Alexander was much surprised at this demand: his mind was entirely filled at that moment with apprehensions concerning the re-establishment of Poland and the execution of the Treaty of Tilsit. The draft of a convention had just been drawn up between France and Russia upon the following bases:—1st. Reciprocal engagement never to permit the re-establishment of Poland; 2nd. The suppression of the words “Poland” and “Poles” in all public acts, &c. When the matrimonial demand was made Alexander perceived the price which he was expected to pay for the convention. The Czar was highly irritated, but still he disguised his wrath and promised to use his influence with his mother to obtain her consent, well knowing, after what had occurred, that that consent would never be given. On the 4th January, 1810, Alexander having expressed his ability to remove the opposition of his mother, Caulaincourt at once signed the convention, being convinced that this important concession would decide matters. On his side the Czar dragged on negotiations with the Empress in hopes that Napoleon would ratify the convention before receiving a definite reply. On the 10th January Caulaincourt received orders to demand a positive reply within ten days. The effect of this ultimatum may be easily imagined. It took couriers from fifteen to twenty days to accomplish the distance between St. Petersburg and Paris. It was on the 28th December only that the first demand had been made, and Napoleon

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had not had time to receive a despatch from Caulaincourt on the subject. Then why this ultimatum, which was equivalent to a rupture? The fact is that the perspective of another alliance more flattering in a dynastic point of view had presented itself, and that the Emperor had received assurances from several quarters that a demand addressed to Vienna would meet with a favourable reply. His vanity was intensely gratified, and he at once determined to break off negotiations with St. Petersburg.

On the 21st January, that is to say, a fortnight before the time had expired for receiving a reply from Russia, Napoleon assembled a privy council at the Tuileries to deliberate on the choice of an alliance. Five privy councillors voted in favour of an Austrian, two in favour of a Russian, and two in favour of a Saxon princess. Talleyrand was for an Archduchess, and Cambacérès for a Grand Duchess; because, as he said afterwards—"The Emperor is sure to make war against the Power to which he is not allied, and I dread a march to St. Petersburg more than a march to Vienna."

On the 6th February despatches from Caulaincourt arrived announcing that the Court of St. Petersburg had not come to a decision. The fact is that the Empress had declared that a Russian princess was not to be wooed and won in a week, and that her daughter, who was only sixteen, was too young to be married before three years. She had lost two daughters by marrying them at too early an age, and she would not sacrifice a third. Then, according to the Greek rite, the Grand Duchess could not marry a man who had divorced his first wife. The Czar did not absolutely reject the alliance, but he insisted that, in the event of a marriage, his sister should be allowed the free exercise of her religion. On the reception of this despatch Napoleon at once wrote to Caulaincourt saying that he considered himself disengaged. The very same day he had his marriage contract with Marie Louise drawn out on the model of that between Louis XVI. and Marie

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Antoinette, and this contract was immediately signed by the Austrian ambassador, Prince Schwartzberg, who a few months before had been sent to St. Petersburg to demand the hand of a Russian Grand Duchess for an Austrian Archduke. The rapidity with which this contract was concluded naturally proved that negotiations had been going on with Austria and with Russia at the same time, although Napoleon afterwards denied this. Prince Metternich says in his *Memoirs* that he was puzzled in which negotiations to put faith; in those openly carried on with Russia, or in those secretly carried on with Austria. With any one else but Napoleon he would not have hesitated about believing in the secret negotiation.

The diplomatists who were opposed to the Austrian marriage urged that no alliance with the Court of Austria could be sincere. That Austria had suffered too much at the hands of France for the wounds to be healed by a matrimonial arrangement; that she would never be able to forget and forgive the loss of Lombardy, Venice, the Tyrol, Suabia, Dalmatia, Illyria, Galicia, and Belgium, and the Imperial Crown of Germany, while Tuscany had been taken from one of the Archdukes and finally handed over to Napoleon's sister Eliza. However, the Court of Vienna accepted the proffered alliance without hesitation. The fact is that it had learned with terror that negotiations had been opened with St. Petersburg, whereas its policy, before and after Wagram, had been to sow dissension between the two Powers which threatened the existence of Austria. It was for this reason that she had offered Galicia to Napoleon, foreseeing the irritation which Russia would feel upon finding France at her frontier and a co-partner of Poland. She caught eagerly at the suggestion of a matrimonial alliance, which would save her from the perils with which she was menaced; and the overtures once commenced ran smoothly, especially as Austria nobly declared that this marriage was not to form the subject of any bargaining. The alliance was accepted unconditionally, but at the same

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time it was hoped that it would give Austria time to recover from her reverses, and that it would prevent a schism in the Church by healing the breach between the Emperor and the Pope. It was to further the latter object that Josephine exerted her influence in favour of the Austrian alliance.

On the day that Napoleon received Caulaincourt's despatch (6th February) he refused to ratify the convention with regard to Poland. As soon as the marriage with Marie Louise was arranged the Emperor set to work to procure the dissolution of the religious tie which either bound him, or was supposed to bind him, to Josephine. There had been no difficulty in having the civil marriage annulled. Mutual consent was sufficient for that. But before wedding the daughter of his most apostolical majesty of Austria it was necessary for his most Christian majesty the eldest son of the Church to procure a divorce.

Strange to say, it is still a matter of doubt whether Napoleon and Josephine were ever married at the altar. There is not a scrap of documentary evidence to prove it. The official account relates that on the eve of the coronation the Pope refused to officiate unless the Emperor made Josephine his wife, the Church not recognising the civil marriage. To avoid a scandal Napoleon consented, and the religious ceremony was secretly performed at the Tuileries by Cardinal Fesch, with the consent of the Pope, and in presence of Duroc, Berthier, and Talleyrand, on the night of the 1st December, 1804. M. Thiers, in his *History*, says that no one heard a word about this religious ceremony until the divorce was applied for. Is it possible that so important a matter could have been kept secret for more than five years? M. Thiers says that the Pope and Cardinal Consalvi were bound to secrecy by the seal of confession. But this was not the case with Cardinal Fesch, nor with the witnesses, nor with Madame de Rémusat, who says that Josephine told all about the wedding the day after it was performed; nor with Prince Eugene, to whom

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Josephine said that she sent the marriage certificate lest Napoleon should take it from her and destroy it—a certificate which has never been brought into court.

Prince Metternich, in his *Memoirs*, says that Consalvi, shortly after he left the ministry, confided this tale to him:—"The Pope made up his mind not to appear at the coronation unless first satisfied of the validity of the marriage between Napoleon and Josephine. Upon this, two or three bishops whom Cardinal Consalvi named to me, paid the Holy Father a visit, removed his doubts, and gave him full details of the sacramental tie which united the Emperor and the Empress. The Holy Father deceived, crowned them the next morning, and it was not until several days after the coronation that he learned he had been imposed upon." The Pope was tempted at first to make a scandal, but for various reasons he changed his mind. "This circumstance," continues Prince Metternich, "was known to only three cardinals, who were horror-struck at the perfidy of the bishops, but they also taxed the Pope with too much credulity on this occasion."

In considering the above statement it is right to remember that Prince Metternich was interested in showing that no sacred tie united Napoleon and Josephine. The court of Vienna always declared that the existence of such a tie would stand in the way of an alliance with Austria.

The only way out of this dilemma was to prove that the secret marriage had not been performed in accordance with canon law, and that the Church could therefore declare that it had never taken place, that it was null and void. It had always been the custom for popes to decide upon such matters when they affected crowned heads; but how could Napoleon appeal to Pius VII., whom he held a close prisoner at Savona, and who had so obstinately refused a divorce in the case of Prince Jerome? Cambacérès helped his Majesty out of this difficulty by telling him that the intervention of the Pope

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would be necessary to dissolve a regular marriage, but that it was not required in the case of a marriage in which no rules had been observed, and that the matter concerned only the officiality of Paris, an ecclesiastical tribunal of three degrees—the diocesan, the metropolitan, and the primatial officialities.

It was to this court that the case was referred. It was argued on the part of the Emperor that the secret marriage was null for three reasons—1st, because the parish priest was not present, as required by canon law; 2nd, owing to the absence of proper witnesses; 3rd, owing to want of consent! As regards the first plea, the permission which Cardinal Fesch obtained from the Pope to celebrate the marriage did away with the necessity of the presence of the parish priest. As regards plea two, the Council of Trent lays down that there should be two witnesses, and there were three. With respect to the last plea, no wonder that a member of the court found it absurd, as he said, “on the part of a man before whom we all trembled, this plea never being invoked except in the case of a minor, the victim of surprise or of violence.”

The diocesan officiality declared the marriage null because it had been contracted in the absence of the parish priest and of proper witnesses. Their majesties were therefore declared free to form other alliances, were forbidden to hold any further communion with each other, and were condemned to pay a certain sum to the poor of Paris for having sinned against the Church by indulging in a false marriage.

From the diocesan the case was taken up to the metropolitan officiality, which also pronounced the marriage null, but based its decision on the non-consent of the Emperor, who pleaded that he had been forced into it. The upper court, too, struck out the fine, which it considered degrading.

The position of Cardinal Fesch was curious enough in this affair; the secret marriage which he declared to have

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been regular was condemned as irregular, but this did not prevent him from consenting to officiate at the marriage of Marie Louise. Now Abbé Lyonnet, in his life of the Cardinal, says that at this very period he was asked to obtain a divorce for a lady. The Cardinal replied :—"The Catholic religion forbids divorce, and the ecclesiastical authorities have no right to dissolve a tie the nature of which is divine."

Thus wrote the prelate who declared that the secret marriage with Josephine was valid, and who nevertheless consented to join together Napoleon and Marie Louise in holy wedlock. It was also curious to find the Pontiff in 1804 declaring that he would not crown a woman who was living, in the eye of the Church, in a state of concubinage; and the court of Vienna, so punctilious in matters of religion, declaring that had Josephine been anything else but a concubine it would have rejected the proffered alliance. The Pope asked for proof that a state of sin had ceased to exist, and Austria demanded proofs to the contrary. The court of Vienna objected to a prince who had been previously married, and yet gave the hand of the Archduchess Marie Louise to a prince who was labouring under a sentence of excommunication, and had constituted himself the jailer of the vicar of Christ upon earth.

A good many letters touching upon the strained relations between Church and State in 1810 are published in *The Correspondence*, but a good many also have been omitted, as we shall see. The irritation displayed by Napoleon at this period was intensified by the opposition of some of the prelates to his wishes. Twenty-seven cardinals had been summoned from Rome to form an ecclesiastical committee intended to act as a council and to supersede the Pope, who obstinately refused to consecrate the bishops appointed by Napoleon or to acquiesce in the loss of his temporal power. Out of these twenty-seven cardinals thirteen, headed by Consalvi, the papal legate, refused to attend the second marriage, in

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spite of the threats of Fouché, considering that none but the Pope could annul the first marriage.

Marie Louise was first married by proxy at Vienna, then the civil marriage was performed at St. Cloud, and finally the religious marriage at the Tuileries. It was from this last ceremony that Consalvi and his brother-cardinals absented themselves, to the great wrath of Napoleon, who felt that a slur was thus cast on the legitimacy of his second marriage. The cardinals paid dearly for their boldness. Consalvi says that the Emperor gave orders for Cardinals di Pietro, Oppizoni, and himself to be shot, but that they were saved by the intervention of Fouché. They were all, however, stripped of their external attributes, were deprived of the scarlet, and were afterwards known as the "black cardinals"; they were deprived even of the means of existence, had to subsist on charity, and were exiled to various towns in France, and remained under the supervision of the police until the concordat of Fontainebleau was signed. It was certainly trying to Napoleon's temper to find, after having wittingly indulged in two false marriages, the validity of one in which he was deeply concerned indirectly denounced by thirteen cardinals.

During the year 1810 the Pope remained inflexible; he refused to listen to the offers made by Comte Salmatoris on the part of Napoleon, to the entreaties of Cardinals Fesch, Maury, Caprera, Spina, and Caselli, or to the political reasons advanced by the Austrian diplomatist Lebzelter. He had been accustomed to the austerities of a monastic life, and he could support the severity of his captivity at Savona.

In 1809 Napoleon wished to exchange the Hanse towns with Louis for Brabant. In 1810 his Majesty, having driven Louis from his throne by his vexatious policy, in regard to the continental blockade, annexed both the Hanse towns and Holland, not to speak of Valais, the Duchy of Oldenburg, a portion of Hanover, and the whole

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coast from the Ems to the Elbe. With Russia Napoleon was already on bad terms, and he appeared determined to goad Sweden to desperation.

In 1810 King Charles XIII., finding himself without a successor, consulted Napoleon on the advisability of choosing the brother of the Duke of Augustenburg as his heir. The Emperor gave it to be understood that he would prefer another candidate, and secretly urged the King of Denmark to come forward. The king took the advice of Napoleon, and wrote to Charles XIII. on the subject. Now the King of Denmark was so unpopular in Sweden that the very announcement of his candidature caused a popular rising. The Emperor left his ambassador without instructions, and Charles XIII., embarrassed at having to choose between a candidate hateful to the nation and one disagreeable to Napoleon, adopted a third course, and offered the succession to Bernadotte, who had made himself exceedingly popular with all classes when in command of a French force in Pomerania. This choice was highly approved of by the chambers and by the people. Bernadotte was elected Prince Royal of Sweden under the idea that a marshal allied to the imperial family would be grateful to the Emperor, and that all the difficulties with France would be removed. When Napoleon heard of this election he overwhelmed the Swedish ambassador with invectives, accused Sweden of not observing the continental blockade, and told poor Lagerbielke to choose between the cannon-balls of the English and war with France.

Prince Metternich says that the dilatoriness of Napoleon in this affair arose from the fact of his desire to place a member of his own family on the throne, and that when Josephine heard that Bernadotte had been elected she exclaimed—"The wretch! to desert his God for a throne; none of mine would do that." And in fact Napoleon appears to have offered the Swedish succession to Prince Eugene, whose eldest daughter, by the way, afterwards