Chapter 21

THE SCHEDULE OF THE DIRECTORY

We have said that Moreau, furnished no doubt with instructions, left the little house in the Rue de la Victoire, while Bonaparte returned alone to the salon. Everything furnished an object of comment in such a company as was there assembled; the absence of Moreau, the return of Bonaparte unaccompanied, and the visible good humor which animated his countenance, were all remarked upon.

The eyes which fastened upon him most ardently were those of Josephine and Roland. Moreau for Bonaparte added twenty chances to the success of the plot; Moreau against Bonaparte robbed him of fifty. Josephine's eyes were so supplicating that, on leaving Lucien, Bonaparte pushed his brother toward his wife. Lucien understood, and approached Josephine, saying: "All is well."

"Moreau?"

"With us."

"I thought he was a Republican."

"He has been made to see that we are acting for the good of the Republic."

"I should have thought him ambitious," said Roland.

Lucien started and looked at the young man.

"You are right," said he.

"Then," remarked Josephine, "if he is ambitious he will not let Bonaparte seize the power."

"Why not?"

"Because he will want it himself."

"Yes; but he will wait till it comes to him ready-made, inasmuch as he doesn't know how to create it, and is afraid to seize it."

During this time Bonaparte had joined the group which had formed around Talma after dinner, as well as before. Remarkable men are always the centre of attraction.

"What are you saying, Talma?" demanded Bonaparte. "It seems to me they are listening to you very attentively."

"Yes, but my reign is over," replied the artist.

"Why so?"

"I do as citizen Barras has done; I abdicate?"

"So citizen Barras has abdicated?"

"So rumor says."

"Is it known who will take his place?"

"It is surmised."

"Is it one of your friends, Talma?"

"Time was," said Talma, bowing, "when he did me the honor to say I was his."

"Well, in that case, Talma, I shall ask for your influence."

"Granted," said Talma, laughing; "it only remains to ask how it can serve you."

"Get me sent back to Italy; Barras would not let me go."

"The deuce!" said Talma; "don't you know the song, general, 'We won't go back to the woods when the laurels are clipped'?"

"Oh! Roscius, Roscius!" said Bonaparte, smiling, "have you grown a flatterer during my absence?"

"Roscius was the friend of Cæsar, general, and when the conqueror returned from Gaul he probably said to him about the same thing I have said to you."

Bonaparte laid his band on Talma's shoulder.

"Would he have said the same words after crossing the Rubicon?"

Talma looked Bonaparte straight in the face.

"No," he replied; "he would have said, like the augur, 'Cæsar, beware of the Ides of March!'"

Bonaparte slipped his hand into his breast as if in search of something; finding the dagger of the Companions of Jehu, he grasped it convulsively. Had he a presentiment of the conspiracies of Arena, Saint-Regent, and Cadoudal?

Just then the door opened and a servant announced: "General Bernadotte!"

"Bernadotte," muttered Bonaparte, involuntarily. "What does he want here?"

Since Bonaparte's return, Bernadotte had held aloof from him, refusing all the advances which the general-in-chief and his friends had made him. The fact is, Bernadotte had long since discerned the politician beneath the soldier's greatcoat, the dictator beneath the general, and Bernadotte, for all that he became king in later years, was at that time a very different Republican from Moreau. Moreover, Bernadotte believed he had reason to complain of Bonaparte. His military career had not been less brilliant than that of the young general; his fortunes were destined to run parallel with his to the end, only, more fortunate than that other--Bernadotte was to die on his throne. It is true, he did not conquer that throne; he was called to it.

Son of a lawyer at Pau, Bernadotte, born in 1764--that is to say, five years before Bonaparte--was in the ranks as a private soldier when only eighteen. In 1789 he was only a sergeant-major. But those were the days of rapid promotion. In 1794, Kléber created him brigadier-general on the field of battle, where he had decided the fortunes of the day. Becoming a general of division, he played a brilliant part at Fleurus and Juliers, forced Maestricht to capitulate, took Altdorf, and protected, against an army twice as numerous as his own, the retreat of Joubert. In 1797 the Directory ordered

him to take seventeen thousand men to Bonaparte. These seventeen thousand men were his old soldiers, veterans of Kléber, Marceau and Hoche, soldiers of the Sambre-et-Meuse; and yet Bernadotte forgot all rivalry and seconded Bonaparte with all his might, taking part in the passage of the Tagliamento, capturing Gradiska, Trieste, Laybach, Idria, bringing back to the Directory, after the campaign, the flags of the enemy, and accepting, possibly with reluctance, an embassy to Vienna, while Bonaparte secured the command of the army of Egypt.

At Vienna, a riot, excited by the tri-color flag hoisted above the French embassy, for which the ambassador was unable to obtain redress, forced him to demand his passports. On his return to Paris, the Directory appointed him Minister of War. An underhand proceeding of Sièyes, who was offended by Bernadotte's republicanism, induced the latter to send in his resignation. It was accepted, and when Bonaparte landed at Fréjus the late minister had been three months out of office. Since Bonaparte's return, some of Bernadotte's friends had sought to bring about his reinstatement; but Bonaparte had opposed it. The result was a hostility between the two generals, none the less real because not openly avowed.

Bernadotte's appearance in Bonaparte's salon was therefore an event almost as extraordinary as the presence of Moreau. And the entrance of the conqueror of Maestricht caused as many heads to turn as had that of the conqueror of Rastadt. Only, instead of going forward to meet him, as he had Moreau, Bonaparte merely turned round and awaited him.

Bernadotte, from the threshold of the door, cast a rapid glance around the salon. He divided and analyzed the groups, and although he must have perceived Bonaparte in the midst of the principal one, he went up to Josephine, who was reclining on a couch at the corner of the fireplace, like the statue of Agrippina in the Pitti, and, addressing her with chivalric courtesy, inquired for her health; then only did he raise his head as if to look for Bonaparte. At such a time everything was of too much importance for those present not to remark this affectation of courtesy on Bernadotte's part.

Bonaparte, with his rapid, comprehensive intellect, was not the last to notice this; he was seized with impatience, and, instead of awaiting Bernadotte in the midst of the group where he happened to be, he turned abruptly to the embrasure of a window, as if to challenge the ex-minister of war to follow him. Bernadotte bowed graciously to right and left, and controlling his usually mobile face to an expression of perfect calmness, he walked toward Bonaparte, who awaited him as a wrestler awaits his antagonist, the right foot forward and his lips compressed. The two men bowed, but Bonaparte made no movement to extend his hand to Bernadotte, nor did the latter offer to take it.

"Is it you?" asked Bonaparte. "I am glad to see you."

"Thank you, general," replied Bernadotte. "I have come because I wish to give you a few explanations."

"I did not recognize you at first."

"Yet I think, general, that my name was announced by your servant in a voice loud enough to prevent any doubt as to my identity."

"Yes, but he announced General Bernadotte."

"Well?"

"Well, I saw a man in civilian's dress, and though I recognized you, I doubted if it were really you."

For some time past Bernadotte had affected to wear civilian's dress in preference to his uniform.

"You know," said he, laughing, "that I am only half a soldier now. I was retired by citizen Sièyes."

"It seems that it was lucky for me that you were no longer minister of war when I landed at Fréjus."

"How so?"

"You said, so I was told, that had you received the order to arrest me for violating quarantine you would have done so."

"I said it, and I repeat it, general. As a soldier I was always a faithful observer of discipline. As a minister I was a slave to law."

Bonaparte bit his lips. "And will you say, after that, that you have not a personal enmity to me?"

"A personal enmity to you, general?" replied Bernadotte. "Why should I have? We have always gone together, almost in the same stride; I was even made general before you. While my campaigns on the Rhine were less brilliant than yours on the Adige, they were not less profitable for the Republic; and when I had the honor to serve under you, you found in me, I hope, a subordinate devoted, if not to the man, at least to the country which he served. It is true that since your departure, general, I have been more fortunate than you in not having the responsibility of a great army, which, if one may believe Kléber's despatches, you have left in a disastrous position."

"What do you mean? Kléber's last despatches? Has Kléber written?"

"Are you ignorant of that, general? Has the Directory not informed you of the complaints of your successor? That would be a great weakness on their part,

and I congratulate myself to have come here, not only to correct in your mind what has been said of me, but to tell you what is being said of you."

Bonaparte fixed an eye, darkling as an eagle's, on Bernadotte. "And what are they saying of me?" he asked.

"They say that, as you must come back, you should have brought the army with you."

"Had I a fleet? Are you unaware that De Brueys allowed his to be burned?"

"They also say, general, that, being unable to bring back the army, it would have been better for your renown had you remained with it."

"That is what I should have done, monsieur, if events had not recalled me to France."

"What events, general?"

"Your defeats."

"Pardon me, general; you mean to say Schérer's defeats.

"Yours as well."

"I was not answerable for the generals commanding our armies on the Rhine and in Italy until I was minister of war. If you will enumerate the victories and defeats since that time you will see on which side the scale turns."

"You certainly do not intend to tell me that matters are in a good condition?"

"No, but I do say that they are not in so desperate state as you affect to believe."

"As I affect!--Truly, general, to hear you one would think I had some interest in lowering France in the eyes of foreigners.

"I don't say that; I say that I wish to settle the balance of our victories and defeats for the last three months; and as I came for that, and am now in your house, and in the position of an accused person--"

"Or an accuser."

"As the accused, in the first instance--I begin."

"And I listen," said Bonaparte, visibly on thorns.

"My ministry dates from the 30th Prairial, the 8th of June if you prefer; we will not quarrel over words."

"Which means that we shall quarrel about things."

Bernadotte continued without replying.

"I became minister, as I said, the 8th of June; that is, a short time after the siege of Saint-Jean-d'Acre was raised."

Bonaparte bit his lips. "I did not raise the siege until after I had ruined the fortifications," he replied.

"That is not what Kléber wrote; but that does not concern me." Then he added, smiling: "It happened while Clark was minister."

There was a moment's silence, during which Bonaparte endeavored to make Bernadotte lower his eyes. Not succeeding, he said: "Go on."

Bernadotte bowed and continued: "Perhaps no minister of war--and the archives of the ministry are there for reference--ever received the portfolio under more critical circumstances: civil war within, a foreign enemy at our doors, discouragement rife among our veteran armies, absolute destitution of means to equip new ones. That was what I had to face on the 8th of June, when I entered upon my duties. An active correspondence, dating from the 8th of June, between the civil and military authorities, revived their courage and their hopes. My addresses to the armies--this may have been a mistake--were those, not of a minister to his soldiers, but of a comrade among comrades, just as my addresses to the administrators were those of a citizen to his fellow-citizens. I appealed to the courage of the army, and the heart of the French people; I obtained all that I had asked. The National Guard reorganized with renewed zeal; legions were formed upon the Rhine, on the Moselle. Battalions of veterans took the place of old regiments to reinforce the troops that were guarding our frontiers; to-day our cavalry is recruited by a remount of forty thousand horses, and one hundred thousand conscripts, armed and equipped, have received with cries of 'Vive la Republique!' the flags under which they will fight and conquer--"

"But," interrupted Bonaparte bitterly, "this is an apology you are making for yourself."

"Be it so. I will divide my discourse into two parts. The first will be a contestable apology; the second an array of incontestable facts. I will set aside the apology and proceed to facts. June 17 and 18, the battle of the Trebbia. Macdonald wished to fight without Moreau; he crossed the Trebbia, attacked the enemy, was defeated and retreated to Modena. June 20, battle

of Tortona; Moreau defeated the Austrian Bellegarde. July 22, surrender of the citadel of Alexandria to the Austro-Russians. So far the scale turns to defeat. July 30, surrender of Mantua, another check. August 15, battle of Novi; this time it was more than a check, it was a defeat. Take note of it, general, for it is the last. At the very moment we were fighting at Novi, Masséna was maintaining his position at Zug and Lucerne, and strengthening himself on the Aar and on the Rhine; while Lecourbe, on August 14 and 15, took the Saint-Gothard. August 19, battle of Bergen; Brune defeated the Anglo-Russian army, forty thousand strong, and captured the Russian general, Hermann. On the 25th, 26th and 27th of the same month, the battles of Zurich, where Masséna defeated the Austro-Russians under Korsakoff. Hotze and three other generals are taken prisoners. The enemy lost twelve thousand men, a hundred cannon, and all its baggage; the Austrians, separated from the Russians, could not rejoin them until after they were driven beyond Lake Constance. That series of victories stopped the progress the enemy had been making since the beginning of the campaign; from the time Zurich was retaken, France was secure from invasion. August 30, Molitor defeated the Austrian generals, Jellachich and Luiken, and drove them back into the Grisons. September 1, Molitor attacked and defeated General Rosenberg in the Mutterthal. On the 2d, Molitor forced Souvaroff to evacuate Glarus, to abandon his wounded, his cannon, and sixteen hundred prisoners. The 6th, General Brune again defeated the Anglo-Russians, under the command of the Duke of York. On the 7th, General Gazan took possession of Constance. On the 8th you landed at Fréjus.--Well, general," continued Bernadotte, "as France will probably pass into your hands, it is well that you should know the state in which you find her, and in place of receipt, our possessions bear witness to what we are giving you. What we are now doing, general, is history, and it is important that those who may some day have an interest in falsifying history shall find in their path the denial of Bernadotte."

"Is that said for my benefit, general?"

"I say that for flatterers. You have pretended, it is said, that you returned to France because our armies were destroyed, because France was threatened, the Republic at bay. You may have left Egypt with that fear; but once in France, all such fears must have given way to a totally different belief."

"I ask no better than to believe as you do," replied Bonaparte, with sovereign dignity; "and the more grand and powerful you prove France to be, the more grateful am I to those who have secured her grandeur and her power."

"Oh, the result is plain, general! Three armies defeated; the Russians exterminated, the Austrians defeated and forced to fly, twenty thousand prisoners, a hundred pieces of cannon, fifteen flags, all the baggage of the enemy in our possession, nine generals taken or killed, Switzerland free, our frontiers safe, the Rhine our limit--so much for Masséna's contingent and the situation of Helvetia. The Anglo-Russian army twice defeated, utterly discouraged, abandoning its artillery, baggage, munitions of war and commissariat, even to the women and children who came with the British; eight thousand French prisoners; effective men, returned to France; Holland completely evacuated--so much for Brune's contingent and the situation in Holland. The rearguard of General Klénau forced to lay down its arms at Villanova; a thousand prisoners and three pieces of cannon fallen into our hands, and the Austrians driven back beyond Bormida; in all, counting the combats at la Stura and Pignerol, four thousand prisoners, sixteen cannon, Mondovi, and the occupation of the whole region between la Stura and Tanaro--so much for Championnet's contingent and the situation in Italy. Two hundred thousand men under arms, forty thousand mounted cavalry; that is my contingent, mine, and the situation in France."

"But," asked Bonaparte satirically, "if you have, as you say, two hundred thousand soldiers under arms, why do you want me to bring back the fifteen or twenty thousand men I have in Egypt, who are useful there as colonizers?"

"If I ask you for them, general, it is not for any need we may have of them, but in the fear of some disaster over taking them."

"What disaster do you expect to befall them, commanded by Kléber?"

"Kléber may be killed, general; and who is there behind Kléber? Menou. Kléber and your twenty thousand men are doomed, general!"

"How doomed?"

"Yes, the Sultan will send troops; he controls by land. The English will send their fleet; they control by sea. We, who have neither land nor sea, will be compelled to take part from here in the evacuation of Egypt and the capitulation of our army.

"You take a gloomy view of things, general!"

"The future will show which of us two have seen things as they are."

"What would you have done in my place?"

"I don't know. But, even had I been forced to bring them back by way of Constantinople, I should never have abandoned those whom France had intrusted to me. Xenophon, on the banks of the Tigris, was in a much more desperate situation than you on the banks of the Nile. He brought his ten thousand back to Ionia, and they were not the children of Athens, not his fellow citizens; they were mercenaries!"

From the instant Bernadotte uttered the word Constantinople, Bonaparte listened no longer; the name seemed to rouse a new train of ideas in his mind, which he followed in solitary thought. He laid his hand on the arm of the astonished Bernadotte, and, with eyes fixed on space, like a man who pursues through space the phantom of a vanished project, he said: "Yes, yes! I thought of it. That is why I persisted in taking that hovel, Saint-Jean-d'Acre. Here you only thought it obstinacy, a useless waste of men sacrificed to the self-love of a mediocre general who feared that he might be blamed for a defeat. What should I have cared for the raising of the siege of Saint-Jean-d'Acre, if Saint-Jean-d'Acre had not been the barrier in the way of the grandest project ever conceived. Cities! Why, good God! I could take as many as ever did Alexander or Cæsar, but it was Saint-Jean-d'Acre that had to be

taken! If I had taken Saint-Jean-d'Acre, do you know what I should have done?"

And he fixed his burning eyes upon Bernadotte, who, this time, lowered his under the flame of this genius.

"What I should have done," repeated Bonaparte, and, like Ajax, he seemed to threaten Heaven with his clinched fist; "if I had taken Saint-Jean-d'Acre, I should have found the treasures of the pasha in the city and three thousand stands of arms. With that I should have raised and armed all Syria, so maddened by the ferocity of Djezzar that each time I attacked him the population prayed to God for his overthrow. I should have marched upon Damascus and Aleppo; I should have swelled my army with the malcontents. Advancing into the country, I should, step by step, have proclaimed the abolition of slavery, and the annihilation of the tyrannical government of the pashas. I should have overthrown the Turkish empire, and founded a great empire at Constantinople, which would have fixed my place in history higher than Constantine and Mohammed II. Perhaps I should have returned to Paris by way of Adrianople and Vienna, after annihilating the house of Austria. Well, my dear general, that is the project which that little hovel of a Saint-Jean-d'Acre rendered abortive!"

And he so far forgot to whom he was speaking, as he followed the shadows of his vanished dream, that he called Bernadotte "my dear general." The latter, almost appalled by the magnitude of the project which Bonaparte had unfolded to him, made a step backward.

"Yes," said Bernadotte, "I perceive what you want, for you have just betrayed yourself. Orient or Occident, a throne! A throne? So be it; why not? Count upon me to help you conquer it, but elsewhere than in France. I am a Republican, and I will die a Republican."

Bonaparte shook his head as if to disperse the thoughts which held him in the clouds.

"I, too, am a Republican," said he, "but see what has come of your Republic!"

"What matter!" cried Bernadotte. "It is not to a word or a form that I am faithful, but to the principle. Let the Directors but yield me the power, and I would know how to defend the Republic against her internal enemies, even as I defended her from her foreign enemies."

As he said these words, Bernadotte raised his eyes, and his glance encountered that of Bonaparte. Two naked blades clashing together never sent forth lightning more vivid, more terrible.

Josephine had watched the two men for some time past with anxious attention. She saw the dual glance teeming with reciprocal menace. She rose hastily and went to Bernadotte.

"General," said she.

Bernadotte bowed.

"You are intimate with Gohier, are you not?" she continued.

"He is one of my best friends, madame," said Bernadotte.

"Well, we dine with him the day after to-morrow, the 18th Brumaire; dine there yourself and bring Madame Bernadotte. I should be so glad to know her better."

"Madame," said Bernadotte, "in the days of the Greeks you would have been one of the three graces; in the Middle Ages you would have been a fairy; to-day you are the most adorable woman I know."

And making three steps backward, and bowing, he contrived to retire politely without including Bonaparte in his bow. Josephine followed him with her eyes until he had left the room. Then, turning to her husband, she said: "Well, it seems that it was not as successful with Bernadotte as with Moreau, was it?"

"Bold, adventurous, disinterested, sincere republican, inaccessible to seduction, he is a human obstacle. We must make our way around him, since we cannot overthrow him."

And leaving the salon without taking leave of any one, he went to his study, whither Roland and Bourrienne followed. They had hardly been there a quarter of an hour when the handle of the lock turned softly, the door opened, and Lucien appeared.