Chapter 24

THE EIGHTEENTH BRUMAIRE

On entering the Rue de la Victoire, Bonaparte found Sebastiani's dragoons drawn up in line of battle. He wished to address them, but they interrupted him at the first words, shouting: "We want no explanations. We know that you seek only the good of the Republic. Vive Bonaparte!"

The cortège followed the streets which led from the Rue de la Victoire to the Tuileries, amid the cries of "Vive Bonaparte!"

General Lefebvre, according to promise, was waiting at the palace gates. Bonaparte, on his arrival at the Tuileries, was hailed with the same cheers that had accompanied him. Once there, he raised his head and shook it. Perhaps this cry of "Vive Bonaparte!" did not satisfy him. Was he already dreaming of "Vive Napoleon?"

He advanced in front of the troop, surrounded by his staff, and read the decree of the Five Hundred, which transferred the sessions of the Legislature to Saint-Cloud and gave him the command of the armed forces.

Then, either from memory, or offhand--Bonaparte never admitted any one to such secrets--instead of the proclamation he had dictated to Bourrienne two days earlier, he pronounced these words:

"Soldiers--The Council of Ancients has given me the command of the city and the army.

"I have accepted it, to second the measures to be adopted for the good of the people.

"The Republic has been ill governed for two years. You have hoped for my return to put an end to many evils. You celebrated it with a unanimity which imposes obligations that I now fulfil. Fulfil yours, and second your general with the vigor, firmness and strength I have always found in you.

"Liberty, victory, and peace will restore the French Republic to the rank it occupied in Europe, which ineptitude and treason alone caused her to lose!"

The soldiers applauded frantically. It was a declaration of war against the Directory, and soldiers will always applaud a declaration of war.

The general dismounted, amid shouts and bravos, and entered the Tuileries. It was the second time he had crossed the threshold of this palace of the Valois, whose arches had so ill-sheltered the crown and head of the last Bourbon who had reigned there. Beside him walked citizen Roederer. Bonaparte started as he recognized him, and said:

"Ah! citizen Roederer, you were here on the morning of August 10."

"Yes, general," replied the future Count of the Empire.

"It was you who advised Louis XVI. to go before the National Assembly."

"Yes."

"Bad advice, citizen Roederer! I should not have followed it."

"We advise men according to what we know of them. I would not give General Bonaparte the same advice I gave King Louis XVI. When a king has the fact of his flight to Varennes and the 20th of June behind him, it is difficult to save him."

As Roederer said these words, they reached a window opening on the garden of the Tuileries. Bonaparte stopped, and, seizing Roederer by the arm, he said: "On the 20th of June I was there," pointing with his finger to the terrace by the water, "behind the third linden. Through the open window I could see the poor king, with the red cap on his head. It was a piteous sight; I pitied him."

"What did you do?"

"Nothing, I could do nothing; I was only a lieutenant of artillery. But I longed to go in like the others, and whisper: 'Sire, give me four cannon, and I'll sweep the whole rabble out.'"

What would have happened if Lieutenant Bonaparte had followed his impulse, obtained what he wanted from Louis XVI., and _swept the rabble out_, that is to say the people of Paris? Had his cannon made a clean sweep on June 20th, would he have had to make another the 13th Vendemiaire for the benefit of the Convention?

While the ex-Syndic; who had grown grave, was outlining in his mind the opening pages of his future "History of the Consulate," Bonaparte presented himself at the bar of the Council of the Ancients, followed by his staff, and by all those who chose to do likewise. When the tumult caused by this influx of people had subsided, the president read over the decree which invested Bonaparte with the military power. Then, after requesting him to take the oath, the president added:

"He who has never promised his country a victory which he did not win, cannot fail to keep religiously his new promise to serve her faithfully."

Bonaparte stretched forth his hand and said solemnly:

"I swear it!"

All the generals repeated after him, each for himself:

"I swear it!"

The last one had scarcely finished, when Bonaparte recognized Barras' secretary, that same Bollot of whom Barras had spoken that morning to his two colleagues. He had come there solely to give his patron an account of all that was happening there, but Bonaparte fancied he was sent on some secret mission by Barras. He resolved to spare him the first advance, and went straight to him, saying:

"Have you come on behalf of the Directors?" Then, without giving him time to answer, he continued: "What have they done with that France I left so brilliant? I left peace; I find war. I left victories; I find reverses. I left the millions of Italy, and I find spoliation and penury. What have become of the hundred thousand Frenchmen whom I knew by name? They are dead!"

It was not precisely to Barras' secretary that these words should have been said; but Bonaparte wished to say them, needed to say them, and little he cared to whom he said them. Perhaps even, from his point of view, it was better to say them to some one who could not answer him. At that moment Sièyes rose.

"Citizens," said he, "the Directors Moulins and Gohier ask to be admitted."

"They are no longer Directors," said Bonaparte, "for there is no longer a Directory."

"But," objected Sièyes, "they have not yet sent in their resignation."

"Then admit them and let them give it," retorted Bonaparte.

Moulins and Gohier entered. They were pale but calm. They knew they came to force a struggle, but behind their resistance may have loomed the Sinnamary. The exiles they sent there the 18th of Fructidor pointed the way.

"I see with satisfaction," Bonaparte hastened to say, "that you have yielded to our wishes and those of your two colleagues."

Gohier made a step forward and said firmly: "We yield neither to your wishes, nor to those of our two colleagues, who are no longer our colleagues, since they have resigned, but to the Law. It requires that the decree transferring the legislative body to Saint-Cloud shall be proclaimed without delay. We have come here to fulfil the duty which the law imposes on us, fully determined to defend it against all factious persons, whoever they may be, who attempt to attack it."

"Your zeal does not astonish us," replied Bonaparte; "and because you are a man who loves his country you will unite with us."

"Unite with you! And why?"

"To save the Republic."

"To save the Republic! There was a time, general, when you had the honor to be its prop. But to-day the glory of saving it is reserved for us."

"You save it!" retorted Bonaparte. "How will you do that? With the means your Constitution gives you? Why, that Constitution is crumbling on all sides, and even if I did not topple it over, it could not last eight days."

"Ah!" cried Moulins, "at last you avow your hostile intentions."

"My intentions are not hostile!" shouted Bonaparte, striking the floor with the heel of his boot. "The Republic is in peril; it must be saved, and I shall do it."

"You do it?" cried Gohier. "It seems to me it is for the Directory, not you, to say, 'I shall do it!'"

"There is no longer a Directory."

"I did indeed hear that you said so just a moment before we came in."

"There is no longer a Directory, now that Sièyes and Ducos have resigned."

"You are mistaken. So long as there are three Directors, the Directory still exists. Neither Moulins, Barras nor myself, have handed in our resignations."

At that moment a paper was slipped in Bonaparte's hand, and a voice said in his ear: "Read it." He did so; then said aloud: "You, yourself, are mistaken. Barras has resigned, for here is his resignation. The law requires three Directors to make a Directory. You are but two, and, as you said just now, whoever resists the law is a rebel." Then handing the paper to the president, he continued: "Add the citizen Barras' resignation to that of citizens Sièyes and Ducos, and proclaim the fall of the Directory. I will announce it to my soldiers."

Moulins and Gohier were confounded. Barras' resignation sapped the foundations of all their plans. Bonaparte had nothing further to do at the

Council of Ancients, but there still remained much to be done in the court of the Tuileries. He went down, followed by those who had accompanied him up. His soldiers no sooner caught sight, of him than they burst into shouts of "Vive Bonaparte!" more noisily and more eagerly than ever. He sprang into his saddle and made them a sign that he wished to speak to them. Ten thousand voices that had burst into cries were hushed in a moment. Silence fell as if by enchantment.

"Soldiers," said Bonaparte, in a voice so loud that all could hear it, "your comrades in arms on the frontiers are denuded of the necessaries of life. The people are miserable. The authors of these evils are the factious men against whom I have assembled you to-day. I hope before long to lead you to victory; but first we must deprive those who would stand in the way of public order and general prosperity of their power to do harm."

Whether it was weariness of the government of the Directory, or the fascination exercised by the magic being who called them to victory--so long forgotten in his absence--shouts of enthusiasm arose, and like a train of burning powder spread from the Tuileries to the Carrousel, from the Carrousel to the adjacent streets. Bonaparte profited by this movement. Turning to Moreau, he said:

"General, I will give you proof of the immense confidence I have in you. Bernadotte, whom I left at my house, and who refused to follow us, had the audacity to tell me that if he received orders from the Directory he should execute them against whosoever the agitators might be. General, I confide to you the guardianship of the Luxembourg. The tranquillity of Paris and the welfare of the Republic are in your hands."

And without waiting for a reply he put his horse to a gallop, and rode off to the opposite end of the line.

Moreau, led by military ambition, had consented to play a part in this great drama; he was now forced to accept that which the author assigned him. On returning to the Louvre, Gohier and Moulins found nothing changed apparently. All the sentries were at their posts. They retired to one of the

salons of the presidency to consult together. But they had scarcely begun their conference, when General Jubé, the commandant of the Luxembourg, received orders to join Bonaparte at the Tuileries with the guard of the Directory. Their places were filled by Moreau and a portion of the soldiers who had been electrified by Bonaparte. Nevertheless the two Directors drew up a message for the Council of the Five Hundred, in which they protested energetically against what had been done. When this was finished Gohier handed it to his secretary, and Moulins, half dead with exhaustion, returned to his apartments to take some food.

It was then about four o'clock in the afternoon. An instant later Gohier's secretary returned in great perturbation.

"Well," said Gohier, "why have you not gone?"

"Citizen president," replied the young man, "we are prisoners in the palace."

"Prisoners? What do you mean?"

"The guard has been changed, and General Jubé is no longer in command."

"Who has replaced him?"

"I think some one said General Moreau."

"Moreau? Impossible! And that coward, Barras, where is he?"

"He has started for his country-place at Grosbois."

"Ah! I must see Moulins!" cried Gohier, rushing to the door. But at the entrance he found a sentry who barred the door. Gohier insisted.

"No one can pass," said the sentry.

"What! not pass?"

"No."

"But I am President Gohier!"

"No one can pass," said the sentry; "that is the order."

Gohier saw it would be useless to say more; force would be impossible. He returned to his own rooms.

In the meantime, General Moreau had gone to see Moulins; he wished to justify himself. Without listening to a word the ex-Director turned his back on him, and, as Moreau insisted, he said: "General, go into the ante-chamber. That is the place for jailers."

Moreau bowed his head, and understood for the first time into what a fatal trap his honor had fallen.

At five o'clock, Bonaparte started to return to the Rue de la Victoire; all the generals and superior officers in Paris accompanied him. The blindest, those who had not understood the 13th Vendemiaire, those who had not yet understood the return from Egypt, now saw, blazing over the Tuileries, the star of his future, and as everybody could not be a planet, each sought to become a satellite.

The shouts of "Vive Bonaparte!" which came from the lower part of the Rue du Mont Blanc, and swept like a sonorous wave toward the Rue de la Victoire, told Josephine of her husband's return. The impressionable Creole had awaited him anxiously. She sprang to meet him in such agitation that she was unable to utter a single word.

"Come, come!" said Bonaparte, becoming the kindly man he was in his own home, "calm yourself. We have done to-day all that could be done."

"Is it all over?"

"Oh, no!" replied Bonaparte.

"Must it be done all over again to-morrow?"

"Yes, but to-morrow it will be merely a formality."

That formality was rather rough; but every one knows of the events at Saint-Cloud. We will, therefore, dispense with relating them, and turn at once to the result, impatient as we are to get back to the real subject of our drama, from which the grand historical figure we have introduced diverted us for an instant.

One word more. The 20th Brumaire, at one o'clock in the morning, Bonaparte was appointed First Consul for ten years. He himself selected Cambacérès and Lebrun as his associates under the title of Second Consuls, being firmly resolved this time to concentrate in his own person, not only all the functions of the two consuls, but those of the ministers.

The 20th Brumaire he slept at the Luxembourg in president Gohier's bed, the latter having been liberated with his colleague Moulins.

Roland was made governor of the Luxembourg,