

**THE LIFE OF
NAPOLEON
BONAPARTE**

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The life of Napoleon Bonaparte by Anonymous

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ANONYMOUS


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—“ Nations would do well
To extort their truncheons from the puny hands
Of heroes, whose infirm and baby minds
Are gratified with mischief; and who spoil,
Because men suffer it, their toy—the world.”—COWPER.

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NAPOLEON BONAPARTE.


CHAPTER I.

Birth, education, and early life of Napoleon—Anecdotes of his boyhood and school-days—He joins a regiment of artillery—His literary pursuits—Distinguishes himself at the siege of Toulon.

NAPOLEON BONAPARTE, the bearer of that name

“At which a world grew pale,”

was born at Ajaccio, a town in the island of Corsica, on the 15th of August, 1769. His father was an advocate, or barrister, of some local reputation, but appears not to have possessed any of those striking mental qualities for which his son was so distinguished. Napoleon's mother, however, Lætitia Ramolini, was a woman of superior abilities, as well as of great force of character, and seems to have



transmitted to her child that ardent and energetic disposition which was subsequently developed in his wonderful career. Napoleon's parents, although classed amongst the gentry of the island, were not opulent nor of distinguished rank. When Napoleon afterwards attained to eminence, flatterers were not found wanting who pretended to trace his birth from a distinguished line of Italian princes; but he invariably declined accepting such honours. "I date," said he, "my patent of nobility from my first victory of Monte Notte." Napoleon was the second son of his parents; Joseph, afterwards king of Spain, being his elder brother. He had three younger brothers and three sisters, in addition to five others who had died in infancy. Many reminiscences of Napoleon's boyhood have been preserved. The favourite plaything of the future conqueror is said to have been a brass cannon. A ruined grotto, situated on the sea-shore, is still pointed out as the spot where he was wont to retire, and devote himself to seclusion and contemplation.

"The superiority of Napoleon's character," says Mr. Lockhart, "was early felt. An aged relation, Lucien Bonaparte, archdeacon of Ajaccio, when dying, called the young people

about his death-bed to bid them farewell and to bless them. 'You, Joseph,' said the expiring man, 'are the eldest, but Napoleon is the head of the family. Take care to remember my words.'" Napoleon himself, when at St. Helena, left the following description of his youthful character. "I was," said he, "extremely headstrong, nothing overawed me—nothing disconcerted me; I was quarrelsome, mischievous, afraid of nobody. I beat one, I scratched another; I made myself formidable to the whole family. My mother, however, watched over me with a solicitude unexampled; she suffered nothing but what was grand and elevated to take root in our youthful understandings. She abhorred falsehood, was provoked by disobedience, and passed over none of our faults." Napoleon was accustomed to impute much of his future success to the training he received from his mother. Laudable as her maternal attention appears in many respects to have been, it is impossible not to lament the total absence of religious culture which seems to have pervaded it. Educated in the forms and superstitions of the church of Rome, Napoleon's affections were left uninfluenced by those pious instructions which the

heart, in the tenderness of youth, is, under the Divine blessing, so peculiarly adapted to receive.

Napoleon, when about ten years of age, was sent to the military school of Brienne, his parents having destined him for the profession of arms—a profession at that time, in consequence of a prejudice still too prevalent, viewed as peculiarly the pursuit of a noble and generous mind. Forty years afterwards he spoke of his parting from his mother, upon the occasion referred to, as having been particularly bitter and painful to his feelings. Brienne school, although of a military character, was somewhat inconsistently placed under the superintendence of a few monks, and regulated, in many respects, upon monastic principles. Each pupil was locked up at night in a solitary cell, the whole furniture of which consisted of a bed, an iron water-pitcher, and a basin. Napoleon became much attached to this school. "I was happy at Brienne," was an expression which frequently dropped from his lips, when seated on the throne of empire.

In his manners at this time he appears to have been taciturn and reserved, a circumstance attributable, in a great measure, to the

fact of his having, on his first arrival at school, been imperfectly acquainted with the French language. Corsica, his native island, it may be observed in passing, had been united to France only a short time before the birth of Napoleon. He soon mastered the French tongue, and formed a strong attachment to a boy of the name of Bourienne, who in after-years became his secretary, and the well-known writer of his memoirs. Fichegu, who at a future period headed a conspiracy against Napoleon, was the monitor of the latter at Brienne, and imbibed, in that capacity, such an impression of his resolution and firmness of character, that, when consulted as to the propriety of winning over Napoleon to the cause of the Bourbons, he exclaimed, "It will be lost labour attempting that; I knew him in his youth; he has taken his side, and he will not change it." In the study of the dead languages, and in literature generally, Napoleon made no great progress; but in the mathematical and other sciences, bearing upon military tactics, he was much distinguished.

"One of his teachers," says Mr. Lockhart, "having condemned him for some offence to wear a coarse woollen cloth on a particular

day, and to dine on his knees at the door of the refectory, the boy's spirit swelling under the dishonour, brought on a sudden vomiting and a strong fit of hysterics. The mathematical master passing by, said they did not understand what they were dealing with, and released him." Upon another occasion, Napoleon being anxious to visit, along with his school-fellows, some village festival, which they had been prohibited by their teachers from attending, undermined the walls of the school-garden with so much military skill, that the whole of his party effected their escape through the opening, to the no small astonishment of their guardians.

Bourienne, in his memoirs of Napoleon, mentions another anecdote of the future warrior, which shows how strongly, even in youth, his master-passion began to display its workings. "During the winter of 1783," says the narrator, "so memorable for heavy falls of snow, which everywhere lay to the depth of six or eight feet, Napoleon contrived to stir up the whole school by the proposal of a new amusement. This was to clear various passages through the snow in the great court, and with shovels to erect works, dig trenches, raise