

# The Career of an American Bonaparte

By Stewart T. Beach

CHARLES JOSEPH BONAPARTE: HIS LIFE AND PUBLIC SERVICES. By Joseph Bucklin Bishop. Charles Scribner's Sons. 1922.

CHARLES JOSEPH BONAPARTE was the grandson of Jerome Bonaparte, that ill-starred and weakling brother of Napoleon I, whose marriage in 1803 to Elizabeth Patterson in Baltimore laid the foundation of the Bonaparte family in America and marked the beginnings of one of the most romantic stories in our history.

The Emperor Napoleon, with definite plans for the conduct of his brother's life, registered strenuous objections to Jerome's American marriage, gave strict orders that the lad, who was only nineteen at the time, should not be allowed to land in France if he were accompanied by his wife, and sought a special bill from the Pope to annul the marriage. But the Pope refused to issue the necessary orders, and it is interesting to conjecture that his refusal may have been somewhat colored by his discomfiture over Napoleon's action at his coronation in 1804, when the Corsican seized the crown from his reverend hands and placed it first upon his own head and then upon that of Josephine.

It is common history, of course, that Jerome finally acceded to his brother's wishes, deserted his wife, and received, in return, the Kingdom of Westphalia. Elizabeth Patterson Bonaparte, meanwhile, was feted and received in the highest circles of European society, not only because of her connection with the great name of the Bonapartes but on account of an extraordinary personal beauty and attractiveness as well. Gilbert Stuart's portrait of her,

with three heads on one canvas, showing her face from different angles, bears excellent witness to the authenticity of Europe's judgment. The painter's own explanation of the portrait was his inability to tell from which point of view she appeared to be the most beautiful.

JEROME Napoleon Bonaparte, the son of Elizabeth Patterson and the elder Jerome, had in his turn two sons, Jerome Napoleon Bonaparte and Charles Joseph Bonaparte. The former was twenty-one years older than his brother and sought for himself a military career. He was graduated from West Point, later resigning his commission to go abroad, where he served with distinction in the French Army.

Charles Joseph from his earliest years demonstrated the sincerity and clearness with which he was later able so effectively to concentrate his efforts first upon civil service reform, and later upon the discharge of his duties as Secretary of the Navy and Attorney General successively in Roosevelt's Cabinet. His letters, written from school, show at an astoundingly early age his remarkable aptitude for writing and the command of fluent, idiomatic English which marks a characteristic of his later speeches and essays.

He entered Harvard in 1899 as a junior and was graduated in 1874 from the Law School. It is interesting to note that he entered the university at the time when the late Dr. Eliot was beginning his service as president. Charles Joseph records the early troubles of the president and makes the following comment: "He seems to be a very energetic person, has already made some

changes and contemplates many others, but is very cordially disliked by the professors."

It was in Harvard that his attention was first enlisted in the lifelong fight which he made to free politics from corruption and "bozism." His influence was soon felt in campus circles and was one of the motivating forces in the formation of the Signet Society, an organization, composed of students free from personal ambition, aimed to attempt the freeing of the college from "wire-pullers and toadies."

Although a lawyer by profession, his life aim was expressed in the statement that he hoped upon entering active work he might "see the commencement of an agitation which will end in placing morality and intelligence among the qualities which the American people demand in those who govern them." His rather large fortune made him independent of the fees received from his professional duties, although it in no way lessened his interest in his calling. He is said by his associates to have been one of the most brilliant lawyers of Baltimore, and his remarkable (actual) knowledge of the law gave him an almost uncanny ability to prepare cases in an incredibly short period of time.

He is best known, doubtless, for his activity in Roosevelt's Cabinet, first as Secretary of the Navy and later as Attorney General. In the latter capacity he was associated with the President in the fight which the two waged against corporations and organizations in restraint of trade.

Joseph Bucklin Bishop's biography of a man whose life was so dedicated to public service as was Bonaparte's can hardly receive too superlative a praise. With the primary advantage of having as his subject a

man whose family history has always formed one of the most interesting chapters in American history, Mr. Bishop marshals extraordinary ability as a biographer. His nice sense of selection in the anecdotes and incidents brought together, coupled with a fortunate clarity and vigor of style, makes the book one of the year's most interesting biographies.

## The Ten Best Sellers

The following books are reported by "The Publishers' Weekly" as having the best sale throughout the country during the last month:

### FICTION

"This Freedom," by A. S. M. Hutchinson (Little-Brown). Stacking the cards against mother to keep her at home.

"Babbitt," by Sinclair Lewis (Harcourt-Brace). A bitter burlesque on the average American business man.

"The Breaking Point," by Mary Roberts Rinehart (Doran). A lively and romantic melodrama, with a streak of sound realism running through it.

"Fair Harbor," by Joseph C. Lincoln (Appleton). A Cape Cod yarn of a retired sailorman in charge of an old ladies' home.

"Rough-Hewn," by Dorothy Canfield (Harcourt-Brace). The love story of two well-bred and sincere young New Englanders, with interludes in Italy and France.

"One of Ours," by Willa Cather (Knopf). A fine and touching study of frustrated youthful idealism which found fulfillment and death in the war.

"Simon Called Peter," by Robert Keable (Dutton). The erotic and martial experiences of an Anglican curate.

"Certain People of Importance," by Kathleen Norris (Doubleday-Page). The natural history of an American family through three generations.

"Captain Blood," by Rafael Sabatini (Houghton-Mifflin). The exploits of the polittest pirate that ever swept and dusted the Spanish Main.

"Glimpses of the Moon," by Edith Wharton (Appleton). A minutely exquisite dissection of the idle rich and their parasites.

### NON-FICTION

"The Outline of Science," edited by J. Arthur Thompson (Putnam). A four-volume survey of scientific progress written for the layman.

"The Outline of History," by H. G. Wells (Macmillan). Excellent Wells and pretty good history.

"The Story of Mankind," by Hendrik W. Van Loon (Boni & Liveright). The same enormous subject presented by a scholar, a liberal and also a lucid stylist.

"The Mind in the Making," by James Harvey Robinson (Harper). The beginnings and processes of human thought.

"The Practice of Auto-Suggestion," by Harry Brooks (Dodd-Mead). An American interpretation of Coué.

"Life and Letters of Walter Hines Page," by Burton J. Hendrick (Doubleday-Page). Memoirs of an author, a publisher, an ambassador and a kindly gentleman in one person.

"Letters of Franklin K. Lane" (Houghton-Mifflin). A sincere and high-minded personality as revealed by his private and semi-official correspondence.

"Self-Mastery Through Auto-Suggestion," by Emile Coué (American Library Service). How to be well by thinking so.

"Diet and Health," by L. H. Peters (Reilly & Lee). What to eat and why.

"The Americanization of Edward Bok" by Edward Bok (Scribner). The career of a Dutch in migrant boy who became an American household word.

## An Early American Salon

Continued from page seventeen

being underestimated after their death. When one generation revises the reputations which the preceding one has established it is generally inclined to run to extremes in the process, and some of the criticism recently leveled at the New England circle tends to reduce its pretensions to those of a village literary society. We have to turn to Mrs. Fields to learn that in her day, at least, prophets were not without honor in their own country. For, despite her intimacy with them, Mrs. Fields' attitude toward the New England Olympians was distinctly touched with awe. Her references to Emerson and to Hawthorne, in particular, are in the tone of one speaking of entirely superior beings. "Hawthorne passed the night with us. . . . He was as courteous and as grand as ever and as true. He does not lose that all saddening smile, either." "I like to remember when Mr. Emerson came and what he said and how he looked, for it is a pure benediction to see him. . . . He is a noble purifier of the social atmosphere, always helping the talk up to the highest pitch of thought and feeling."

AN EVEN more striking instance of the veneration in which these men were held is afforded by a very extraordinary letter which Mr. Howe discovered among Mrs. Fields' papers. It was written to Mrs. Fields immediately after Hawthorne's death by his wife. In it Mrs. Hawthorne speaks of her husband with the hushed accents and bated breath of worship. "A person of more uniform majesty never mortal form. So equal a justice that I often wondered if he were human in this. . . . An impartiality of regard that solved all men and subjects. . . . Truth and right alone he deigned to regard. Far below him was every other consideration."

The general impression of Emerson and Hawthorne which we receive from Mrs. Fields' pages is that of men who dwell upon the summits and breathed a more rarefied air than their fellows. And in that withdrawal from all the grosser contacts of life, that quality of something solitary and a little austere which marked them both, the two greatest figures of the New England Renaissance symbolized its entire spirit.

Mrs. Fields did not concern herself only with the more important people of her time. We get glimpses of many of the minor figures with whom she was associated. Among the most interesting of these are Bronson Alcott and the elder Henry James, Bronson Alcott, founder of the short-lived communistic settlement of Fruitlands, was a

singular and original person. He had a passion for experimental reform, educational, philosophic and economic, and seems to have been a sort of New England edition of the *Cente de Saint-Simon*. He also appears to have been somewhat disconcerting to his contemporaries. Mr. Henry James, in particular, looked upon him with a good deal of disapproval, and told Mrs. Fields that "in Alcott the moral sense was wholly dead and the aesthetic sense had never been born." Mr. James also related to her an account of Alcott's behavior during a visit which he paid to Carlyle. Alcott's habits were eccentric and he was far from a desirable guest. On one occasion, according to Mr. James, he ate strawberries and potatoes from the same plate at breakfast, while Carlyle manifested his disapproval of the proceeding by storming up and down the room. Mr. Alcott, however, was not devoid of a certain protective wit, and once when he and Henry James were in heated argument on a theological subject and James, taking exception to a statement of Alcott's, said: "You are an egg, half-hatched; the shells are yet sticking about your head." Alcott replied: "Mr. James, you are damaged goods, and will come up damaged goods in eternity."

OF HENRY JAMES senior Mrs. Fields said: "Analysis is his second nature." This piece of information, in the light of that extraordinary passion for analysis which his illustrious son was later to display in his novels, is highly significant. Alcott was not the only subject to which Mr. James applied his analytical faculty. In a letter to Mrs. Fields he described Emerson as "the divinely pompous rose of the philosophic garden." He also delivered a lecture on the subject of "Woman," of which Mrs. Fields has left an account. "He dealt with it metaphysically. He spoke with unmingled disgust of the idea of woman. . . . forsaking the sanctity and privacy of her home to battle and unsex herself in the hot and dusty arena of the world." One cannot help thinking in this connection of Margaret Fuller, that ardent feminist, who not long before Mr. James had expressed opinions on the subject of woman's position and destiny that were very different from his, and which Boston had found almost intolerably daring and unorthodox, and who in the pursuit of her theories had quitted her native New England for "the hot and dusty arena of the world."

One of the most interesting things in Mrs. Fields' book is the account which she gives of Dickens, who in 1857, during his second visit to America, was often the guest of Mr. and Mrs. Fields. The portrait which Mrs. Fields draws of Dickens is a singularly attractive one, and her records of his conversation impress one with the extraordinary

brilliance and fertility of his mind. A story which Dickens told to Mr. Fields and which Mrs. Fields quotes affords an instance of his phenomenal industry and creative power. "He wrote 'Nicholas Nickleby' and 'Oliver Twist' at the same time for rival magazines month to month." Once he was taken ill, with both magazines waiting for unwritten sheets. He immediately took a steamer to Boulogne, took a room in an inn there

and was able to return just in season for the monthly issues with his work completed."

The very exuberance of Dickens' genius seems to have rather perplexed the eminent New Englanders with whom he came in contact. Longfellow, we learn from Mrs. Fields, did not find Dickens sympathetic. "They have no handle by which to take hold of each other," wrote Mrs. Fields. And Emerson, although he admired Dickens, was plainly baffled and rendered a little uneasy by him. "He is too consummate an artist to have a thread of nature left," Emerson said to Mrs. Fields. "He daunts me. I have not the key." And Dickens, with the prestige of an international fame and the background of a mundane and sophisticated society, must have seemed a rather overwhelming and incomprehensible being to men who had passed the greater part of their lives in the decorous, provincial atmosphere of the New England circle.

MRS. FIELDS'S hospitality was by no means confined to members of that literary group which centered about Boston and Concord. Many other distinguished persons visited her house, among them Bret Harte and such celebrated actors and actresses of the time as Edwin Booth, Joseph Jefferson, Charlotte Cushman, Charles Fechter and Christine Nilsson, the prima donna. But, although Mrs. Fields has left an interesting record of her meetings with all of these people, the principal significance of her reminiscences lies in the information which they afford concerning the great figures of the New England Renaissance whom it was Mrs. Fields' fortune to know so long and so intimately. Mrs. Fields has not told us anything very new or very important concerning them, but she has given us a finely drawn and sympathetic picture of these eminent men and the society in which they moved. It is a society whose importance has diminished with the passage of years and which seems to us today, in many of its aspects, rather pathetically provincial and circumscribed. But it has found the happiest of interpreters in Mrs. Fields, whose rare spirit never failed to understand its finest issues and respond to its most generous aspirations, and whose gracious and gentle memory will always be associated with its fame.