THE BONAPARTES

At Bordentown, New Jersey—Their Magnificent Estate Brought Under the Hammer—Historic Family Memorie

The Once Magnificent Salons Given Over to Dust and Decay—Royal Splendor Eclipsed by Time.

Bordentown correspondence of the New York *Herald:* A stiff quarter of a mile walk over well paved streets and thence along Park avenue, brings me to the Bonaparte property. It now contains a trifle more than 231 acres, though it originally included several large farms further up Crosswick Creek, and embracing altogether about 1000 acres. The park portion of this once splendid estate still exists entire. Behind a picket fence its broad acres are spread out like a carpet of dark green velvet. As your correspondent carried a permit from one of the executors of the estate, the long walk up the Trenton pike to the main gateway seems a most unnecessary bit of circumlocution. So, without more ado, the fence is scaled and we walk cross country toward the mansion house, whose white walls are plainly discernible through the trees that closely environ it. Here, by the side of a tiny streamlet, stands what was called the Lake House, the home of Princess Zenaide, the daughter of Joseph Bonaparte, who accompanied him to America in his exile. As it is still a veritable bit of the past—wasted, neglected (most horrible to relate, whitewashed, like Napoleon's Hermitage, at St. Helena!)—let us take a turn through it before going to the wider ground on the plateau above. This was the dovecot to which Prince Charles and Zenaide returned from their wedding journey. It was a fine house in its day, as the three wide doorways opening upon the veranda indicate. It is a three-story structure of plaster-covered brick, and the rear of the building stands in what was "the lake" at the time of its erection. At that time it overhung the water like a Venetian palace. The brook that crosses the dusty pike under a really fine arched bridge which Prince Bonaparte built at his own cost, now winds through a reedy marsh. When he purchased the place, in 1816, over all the prince's first acts was to build a dam across the narrow valley at the mouth of the little stream and thus to create a pretty lake 200 yards broad by nearly half a mile long. In the lake there were several islands with velvety grass, young trees and fine shrubbery. Black and white swans added life to the idyllic picture. Stairways of stone, which still exist, led down the steep bank side to boat landings, at which little fleets of pleasure craft, with bright-colored awnings, lay moored. Ah! here is a mystery. From the shore of this lake to the house of Prince Bonaparte, which stands where the green sward now is, was an underground passage carefully walled with brick and sealed by heavy doors. The end of this curious exit-way, at the point where it emerged upon the lake front, is clearly discernible. Ascending the stone steps before spoken of, three arched doorways are seen. One of them is large enough for a railway tunnel; the others are small as postern gates.

KING, FARMER, DEMOCRAT.

Born of obscure family in Corsica, he rose with his immortal brother, defended him with energy and talent as a member of the Council of Five Hundred, became a Senator, invaded and conquered the kingdom of Naples, became its ruler, and was made the King—though never master—of Spain. As such he was the peer of such Marshals of France as Soult, Ney, Massena, Jordan, Bessieres, Lannes, Mortier, Victor, Marmont and, with France, fought all the world of Europe." The wearing of two crowns had not worn him out. While at Madrid he studied the landscape gardening about that sepulchral pile of Philip II, that stands about thirty miles to the north west of the capital, and is called the Escurial. These effects he set out to reproduce at Point Breeze after the sun of Napoleon went down forever amid the defeat and carnage of Waterloo. Ah, yes! one thing more he did. He declined the crown of Mexico. He was visited at this very place by a commission from our neighboring peninsula and tendered it. The memorable words of his declination are honey to every lover of this country. Here they are: "Every day I pass in this hospitable land proves more clearly to me the excellence of Republican institutions for America. Keep them as a precious gift from Heaven. Settle your internal commotions; follow the example of the United States and seek among your fellow-citizens a man more capable than I am of acting the great part of Washington."

THE DOVECOT.

But we must enter the Lake House, and not loiter longer outside, though the entire neighborhood were as full of memories as a trust company's office generally is of widows. Gone is the glory of this once fine house. The broad hallway is there, but the mahogany-bannistered stair is look shaky and dangerous. The stairs describe a half circle ere they land before the door of my lady Zenaide's chamber. It is closed and the heavy moulding about the casements would set forth her figure were she only to appear therein. With diffidence, and after an involuntary but unanswered knock, I push back the oak door and enter. This was Zenaide's nest. The apartment is large, and some sacrilegious scamp has papered the walls with the rottenest paper imaginable. The beautiful marble mantel that once was here has been torn out; even the tiles in front of the fire-place are gone and the sand hearth converted by the children of the tenants into tiny castles and bear-pits. The windows are open, and the modernized white blinds hang in the wind just as viciously as they did in Philadelphia last night. Dustrests on the floor that once was covered by the heaviest silken carpets. The relic hunter has been here and the scribbler of names. Ascending the stairway to the top floor, the ceiling is found much lower and the rooms dustier, darker and more spooky. Taken altogether this is a most interesting old home, but the feature that charmed me most was to find that the youngsters thereabouts had converted the large apartment directly over my lady Zenaide's chamber into a roller skating rink. This spoke volumes in behalf of the present age.

THE MANSION IN THE PARK.

How fresh is the open air when one returns to it from a catacomb filled with dead love, lost ambition and corroding grievances! This is a day of all the days of the year to visit this turf strewn with acorns and opened chestnut burrs. Amid the woodland the falling leaves threaten to smother us as was Cambyses by the sands of Africa. Long rows of stately sentry pines keep melancholy guard along the southern side of the broad lawn. In the grass plot are fully twenty acres, and on the northwestern side (not in its center) stands the modern manor house, built by Henry Beckett, son of Sir John Beckett of Somersby Park, Lincolnshire, England. It is a fine Italian villa of three stories, and contains twenty-five spacious apartments, besides many corridors and passageways. It has been unoccupied for many years. Its massive door frames and really imposing stairway and rotunda stamp it as an architectural effort of considerable taste and skill.

RELICS OF ROYAL SPLENDOR.

The main drawing-room, consisting of two large parlors, contains the famous alabaster mantel presented to Joseph Bonaparte by Cardinal Fesch, his uncle. It is one of the most exquisite bits of sculpture in this country, and the two figures that gracefully support the marble ledge recall the two statues that stand in the charmed treasure-room of the Alhambra, at Granada, pointing toward concealed gold that nobody has yet been able to find. That mantel should adorn some public gallery. In the dining-room is another mantel, also sent by his eminence the Cardinal. Two dragons glare at each other across the table that crosses the front of the fireplace. The lace work on the pillars is as delicate as the fabric of Valenciennes. It is a dainty example of the best Italian stonecutters, but it does not rise to the level of a work of real art, as does the mantelpiece first mentioned. A fine glass chandelier hangs in one of the largest rooms that was a gift to Bonaparte from his sister Hortense.

BONAPARTE'S TEASER.

The climb to the cupola is made by a neat stairway, and the view from the top is quite extensive. The broad Delaware is seen beyond the narrow strip of lowland that separates Crosswick's creek from the larger stream, and at the base of the bluff, which ends the plateau so abruptly, is the steamboat landing, whence the small vessels run to Philadelphia. A realization of the vast extent of the park is gained from this lookout. In the days of its grandeur Bonaparte Park contained twelve miles of graded gravel drives. Scope for cross country riding was vast. "Up hill and down dale" was an experience that any rider who had the sweet privilege of hunting there might enjoy. As one walked along the wide avenue that swings gracefully round the rear of the house, constantly pelted by falling hickory nuts and acorns, it was easy to imagine the presence of the tall, fine figure of Joseph Bonaparte striding through these glades, with his trusty pruning hatchet in his hand—an advance upon Charles Martel and his hammer—seeking for small boys, who, despite his utmost vigilance, persisted in setting traps for his hares. Prince Bonaparte had only one cross besides the downfall of his family to bear. That was the persistency of the American small boy. The two individuals did not, never could, understand each other. The small boy of Bordentown was the Blucher of Joseph Bonaparte. He would invade his domain, between two days, and set traps that nobody but the prince could find. Many a cold, raw morning, in the fall or winter, would the prince rise early, swallow a cup of coffee so hot that it made his valet tremble to see him bolt it, seize his hatchet and sally out into the dump woodlands in search of the small boy's traps. It is not recorded that he ever threatened ill to the small boy himself; but he could demolish a rabbit-trap sixty yards by a well directed cast of his weapon. He loved the rabbits better than the boys. The urchins were industrious, and during his long seeking he found many a one. Though the spectacle of an ex-King of Spain seeking poachers is not splendid, no doubt it would have gratified Mr. Henry Bergh to have seen him break a rabbit-trap and release its prey. Over these wide lands Prince Murat hunted during his visits to his uncle. This son of a waiter in a Paris cafe, who rose to be a marshal of France, was a tough lad, and spent his time and money with equal prodigality. In a tramp of several miles one can circumnavigate this natural park of lawn, forest (both soft and hard woods) and tilled ground. The tract is now really divided by iron fences into seven parts. The portion containing the mansion and abutting on the bluff contains fifty-three acres. The other six plots, given to the various purposes of shade and forest trees, corn and wheat, vary in size from twelve to fifty-three acres. The fence that ran around the mansion and abutting on the bluff contains fifty-three acres. The other six plots, given to the various purposes of shade and forest trees, corn and wheat, vary in size from twelve to fifty-three acres. The fence that ran around the park contained twelve miles of graded gravel drives. Scope for cross country riding was vast. "Up hill and down dale" was an experience that any rider who had the sweet privilege of hunting there might enjoy. 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