The Romance of the Bonapartes in America

By LOUIS A. SPRINGER.

JOSEPH BUCKLIN BISHOP in his life of Charles Joseph Bonaparte cites the fact that Mr. Bonaparte was a direct descendant of the Bonapartes of Corsica, having been the grandson of Jerome Bonaparte and the grandnephew of Napoleon I., Emperor of France. Jerome was the youngest of Napoleon's brothers. He came to America in 1803, and, marrying Elizabeth Patterson, daughter of William Patterson of Baltimore, one of the richest men in this country at the time, he founded the American branch of the Bonaparte family.

Joseph, the oldest of Napoleon's brothers, also came to America, arriving here in 1815 after the star of the great Corsican had fallen and the romance of the beautiful Baltimore girl had been rudely shattered. The story of these two brothers in America had so many elements of the unusual that it has remained through all the years one of absorbing and romantic interest.

Mrs. A. M. W. Stirling in her story "Dupe of Destiny" traces the ancestry of William Patterson back through John Patterson, his father, an Irish farmer, to Robert Patterson, the stonemason known through the genius of Sir Walter Scott under his local appellation of "Old Mortality." It was a strange freak of fortune that just two and a half years after "Old Mortality" had been laid to rest in a nameless grave in the Scottish highland that his granddaughter's marriage was celebrated with great pomp and ceremony, a marriage which was destined to make her the wife of a king and the sister-in-law of an emperor, which was to disturb the imperial dreams of the greatest conqueror of modern times, cause a rupture between a Pope and a monarch and to raise her to a high position at European courts and to make her conspicuous among the remarkable women of the nineteenth century.

Jerome met Miss Patterson at the fall races near Baltimore in 1803, the year she made her social debut, and when she was 18. His renown had preceded him, for he had been received with much favor by society in New York and Philadelphia. He was handsome, almost 19 and dressed with fine taste; a contemporary account says that a striking feature of his attire at the races was a magnificent gold chain. Miss Patterson by her own record was dressed in a chamois colored gown of very scant dimensions, a lace handkerchief and an enormous hat covered with pink gauze and ostrich plumes.

Young Bonaparte was fascinated by her beauty of face and figure as well as by her wit and rare intellectual gifts. She responded eagerly to his proffers of love. Mr. Patterson, foreseeing objections by Napoleon to the marriage, at first forbade the courtship and then insisted on a postponement of the marriage until after Jerome had passed his nineteenth year. Miss Patterson settled the matter by declaring that she would rather be the wife of Jerome Bonaparte for an hour than that of any other man for a lifetime.

Jerome and Miss Patterson Married.

A civil contract was drawn up, with every precaution against its future rejection. The religious ceremony was performed by the Bishop of Baltimore, Primate of the Catholic Church in America, on December 24, 1803. A reception such as Baltimore had never seen before followed. A guest, according to a contemporary report, said: "All the clothes worn by the bride might have been put in my pocket; her dress was of extremely fine texture, and beneath it she wore but one garment." After their marriage they visited Washington and were entertained by the French Minister, Gen. Turreau. They extended their tour to Boston, Philadelphia, New York and other cities, where brilliant entertainments were given in their honor.

Nearly four months after the marriage Jerome had his first word from Napoleon. It was an order for him to return to France and directions to the French Consul-General in New York to prohibit all captains of French vessels from receiving on board "the young person to whom Citizen Jerome has connected himself," as it was the First Consul's will "that should she arrive she be suffered not to land, but be sent immediately back to the United States."

Nevertheless Jerome set sail with his wife for Lisbon in March, 1805. Mme. Bonaparte was not permitted to land and her husband went alone to Paris to plead with his brother. They never met again; the uncompromising pressure which Napoleon put on Jerome was more than one of his weak nature could stand. Writing to her father of her husband, Mme. Bonaparte said: "We must certainly act as if we supposed him possessed of some principle and honor."

She found that this supposition was unfounded and in October, 1805, she sailed for the United States with her infant son, who was born in England in July and whom she named Jerome Napoleon Bonaparte. Napoleon did his utmost to have the marriage annulled. He addressed a letter to Pope Pius VII. requesting him to publish a bull making the marriage void. His Holiness returned the gold tiara which the Emperor had sent with his request and a message informing him that careful research had furnished him no authority for granting his wish. Napoleon, it is said, never forgave Pius for this refusal. He found, however, a subservient Imperial Council of State at Paris which obeyed his orders without delay or protest.

The Old Bonaparte Home at Bordentown, N. J.

Jerome—King of Westphalia.

As a reward for the desertion of his wife Jerome was made successor to the imperial throne in the event of Napoleon leaving no heir, and in 1807 he was created King of Westphalia. In the same year he married Princess Fredrica Catherine, daughter of the King of Wurtemburg. Three children were born of this marriage. His short reign was marked by a course of immorality and profligacy which brought upon him frequent rebukes from Napoleon. He offered his American wife a residence in Westphalia. She replied: "It is, indeed, a large kingdom, but not large enough to hold two queens."

He came face to face with her in the Pitti Gallery, Florence, in 1822, after he had been bereft of all for which he had sacrificed her and when she was courted and feted throughout Europe and had gained honors and admiration such as his brief kingship had not won. She passed him without a word or sign of recognition. She refused a pension of 200,000 francs from Jerome, but accepted one of 60,000 from Napoleon. "I prefer to be sheltered under the wing of an eagle rather than to be suspended from the bill of a goose."

Mme. Bonaparte returned to Europe in 1815. In that year Joseph Bonaparte came to America. In personal appearance Joseph bore a striking resemblance to Napoleon; he was, too, more trusted by the Emperor than any one of his brothers and by him he was created King of Naples and King of Spain. After the battle of Waterloo the two brothers met at the island of Aix and Joseph offered to take the Emperor's place. This offer was refused. Napoleon had several times said that if he was forced to leave France he hoped to live in America between New York and Philadelphia.

Louis Etienne St. Denis in his memoirs of the Emperor says that Napoleon was prepared to embark for this country on a lugger commanded by Capt. Besson and that he was to be accompanied on the voyage by the Duke of Rovigo, Gen. Lallemant and himself. A family council, however, was held on the eve of the day set for the embarkation and it was decided that the Emperor should surrender himself to the British. It is a matter of interesting speculation what would have been the result had he kept to his original intention and succeeded in reaching America.

Joseph Comes to America.

Joseph under the name of M. Bouchard boarded the brig Commerce at Royau on July 25, 1815, and reached New York thirty-five days later. He remained in this city for a short time and then going to Philadelphia lived for a while at Lansdowne in Fairmount Park. He purchased a tract of wild land on the Delaware about two miles below Bordentown and seven miles below Trenton. He had the property cleared, roads built, swamps transformed into little lakes and at Point Breeze, on a river bluff, overlooking the Delaware Valley for miles, he built a big, rambling, one story house. He lived at Point Breeze for fifteen years under the name of Count de Survillier.

The first house was burned through the carelessness of a guest and another and better was immediately erected almost on the same site. Princess Caroline Murat in her memoirs says that nothing in Europe could be compared with the glorious sunsets to be seen from Point Breeze. She describes the house as being in the style of an Italian villa with a flat terraced roof overlooking the parks and woods. At the end of a large marble entrance hall was a wide staircase—the steps broad and low, as the Count was in delicate health and no longer young—and on each side reception rooms and a picture gallery with perhaps the finest collection of old masters in America.

There were, too, underground passages and tunnels with openings on the river bank. These were the subject of much mysterious speculation by Joseph's neighbors. By some there were believed to be prepared for the arrival of Napoleon and by others as places of safe retreat in case Spanish desperadoes came to recover the crown jewels of Spain, which it was said Joseph had concealed at Point Breeze.

Of the existence of the jewels there was, perhaps, no doubt, for Joseph is said to have showed to some of his confidants handfuls of unmounted precious stones, sword handles studded with sapphires and rubies, diamond tiaras and heavily jeweled pieces apparently wrenched from some larger ornaments. But the mysterious schooner bearing the great Corsican did not come and, so far as Joseph's neighbors knew, the dreaded Spaniards never put in an appearance.

Life at the home of these American Bonapartes seems to have been extremely pleasant. We have testimony to this effect from Princess Murat and Mary Crawford Fraser (Mrs. Hugh Fraser), who had either enjoyed the hospitality of Point Breeze or had been told of it by members of their families. Many distinguished Americans were guests of Joseph Bonaparte, among them Clay, Webster, the Adamses and Gen. Scott. Lafayette stopped over at Point Breeze when he passed through Bordentown and Louis Napoleon, afterward Napoleon III., found a haven there when he was in America.

Joseph's two daughters, Zenaide and Charlotte, to whom St. Denis refers as Napoleon's favorite neices, lived with him at Point Breeze. Zenaide and her husband, Prince Charles, the ornithologist, remained in America even after Joseph went back to Europe. Charlotte returned to France and married a brother of Napoleon III. Queen Marie, on account of her ill health, did not come to America but remained alone in Italy until she was joined by her husband in 1832.

Lucien Murat's Marriage.

Another member of the Bonaparte household was Prince Lucien Murat, son of Joachim Murat, King of Naples, and Joseph's nephew. He kept his uncle busy meeting his expenses and standing off his creditors. According to the stories told of him, he got credit where he could and borrowed from whom ever would make him a loan. An old account, bearing the date of July 2, 1821, which is still preserved by the descendants of a Bordentown storekeeper, have several entries similar to this one: "Lucien Murat, to money I let him have, $30."

One day the gay, irresponsible young man drove out toward Trenton with the beautiful Georgian Fraser, an heiress of Bordentown. When they came back he announced that they had been married. Joseph sighed, "Whom he marries must support him. I am through." The bright, clear brained American girl undertook the task and fulfilled it successfully as long as they remained in America by conducting a school for young women. They went to Europe later, and a line of socially prominent people are proud to refer to this American girl as a strong, steadying influence in their family history.

In February, 1822, young Jerome Napoleon, then a youth of almost 18, visited his uncle Joseph at his Philadelphia home. He had come at the urging of his mother, who had conceived the plan of a marriage between her son and Charlotte, the youngest of Joseph's daughters. It was thought that Joseph himself favored the match, but Jerome received so little encouragement from his uncle that he wrote to his mother of his reception, and the project was dropped. This was one of the few times that members of the two Bonaparte families in America ever met.

When Joseph Bonaparte sailed from New York for Europe in July, 1832, Bordentown deeply regretted his departure. His presence was felt to have been a public blessing; he greatly increased the prosperity of the town, and he carried its name wherever that of St. Helena was known. There was great rejoicing when he came back five years later.

But in 1839 he left Bordentown again for England, a much older looking and a much more broken man. He promised to return, but he died in Italy, July 27, 1841. His grandchild, a son of Zenaide, lived at Bordentown until he was 25. He inherited the American property of his grandfather. Point Breeze has passed from him through several ownerships. There remain now few traces of its former beauty.

An Unreconciled Heroine.

Mme. Bonaparte returned to America in the early '30s after a brilliant career of almost fifteen years in Europe. Her position was unique and was held by reason of her beauty, charm and the romance of her life: "She was a person apart, a queen uncrowned, incognito, but still a queen." She was never reconciled to the part which she was forced to play: "The Emperor hurled me back to what I hated most, obscurity."

Her son had chosen to remain in America. He was graduated with honor from Harvard in 1826. Three years later he married a Baltimore girl, Miss Susan May Williams. Congratulations came from all members of the Bonaparte family, but none from his mother. She was unable to reconcile herself to the marriage, says Mr. Bishop. In 1861 she established herself in her native

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