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**Memoirs of the Court of St. Cloud
(Being secret letters from a
gentleman at Paris to a nobleman
in London) —Volume 7**

Lewis Goldsmith

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MEMOIRS OF THE COURT OF ST. CLOUD

Being Secret Letters from a Gentleman at Paris to a Nobleman in London

By Lewis Goldsmith

Volume 7

LETTER XXIV.

PARIS, October, 1805.

MY LORD:—Though loudly complained of by the Cabinet of St. Cloud, the Cabinet of St. Petersburg has conducted itself in these critical times with prudence without weakness, and with firmness without obstinacy. In its connections with our Government it has never lost sight of its own dignity, and, therefore, never endured without resentment those impertinent innovations in the etiquette of our Court, and in the manner and language of our Emperor to the representatives of legitimate Sovereigns. Had similar becoming sentiments directed the councils of all other Princes and the behaviour of their Ambassadors here, spirited remonstrances might have moderated the pretensions or passions of upstart vanity, while a forbearance and silence, equally impolitic and shameful, have augmented insolence by flattering the pride of an insupportable and outrageous ambition.

The Emperor of Russia would not have been so well represented here, had he not been so wisely served and advised in his council chamber at St. Petersburg. Ignorance and folly commonly select fools for their agents, while genius and capacity employ men of their own mould, and of their own cast. It is a remarkable truth that, notwithstanding the frequent revolutions in Russia, since the death of Peter the First the ministerial helm has always been in able hands; the progressive and uninterrupted increase of the real and relative power of the Russian Empire evinces the reality of this assertion.

The Russian Chancellor, Count Alexander Woronzoff, may be justly called the chief of political veterans, whether his talents or long services are considered. Catherine II., though a voluptuous Princess, was a great Sovereign, and a competent judge of merit;

and it was her unbiased choice that seated Count Woronzoff, while yet young, in her councils. Though the intrigues of favourites have sometimes removed him, he always retired with the esteem of his Sovereign, and was recalled without caballing or cringing to return. He is admired by all who have the honour of approaching him, as much for his obliging condescension as for his great information. No petty views, no petty caprices, no petty vengeance find room in his generous bosom. He is known to have conferred benefactions, not only on his enemies, but on those who, at the very time, were meditating his destruction. His opinion is that a patriotic Minister should regard no others as his enemies but those conspiring against their country, and acknowledge no friends or favourites incapable of well serving the State. Prince de Z — — — waited on him one day, and, after hesitating some time, began to compliment him on his liberal sentiments, and concluded by asking the place of a governor for his cousin, with whom he had reason to suppose the Count much offended. "I am happy," said His Excellency, "to oblige you, and to do my duty at the same time. Here is a libel he wrote against me, and presented to the Empress, who graciously has communicated it to me, in answer to my recommendation of him yesterday to the place you ask for him to-day. Read what I have written on the libel, and you will be convinced that it will not be my fault if he is not to-day a governor." In two hours afterwards the nomination was announced to Prince de Z — — —, who was himself at the head of a cabal against the Minister. In any country such an act would have been laudable, but where despotism rules with unopposed sway, it is both honourable and praiseworthy.

Prince Adam Czartorinsky, the assistant of Count Woronzoff, and Minister of the foreign department, unites, with the vigour of youth, the experience of age. He has travelled in most countries of Europe, not solely to figure at Courts, to dance at balls, to look at pictures, or to collect curiosities, but to study the character of the people, the laws by which they are governed, and their moral or social influence with regard to their comforts or misery. He therefore brought back with him a stock of knowledge not to be acquired from books, but only found in the world by frequenting different and opposite societies with observation, penetration, and genius. With manners as polished as his mind is well informed, he not only, possesses the

favour, but the friendship of his Prince, and, what is still more rare, is worthy of both. All Sovereigns have favourites, few ever had any friends; because it is more easy to flatter vanity, than to display a liberal disinterestedness; to bow meanly than to instruct or to guide with delicacy and dignity; to abuse the confidence of the Prince than to use it to his honour, and to the advantage of his Government.

That such a Monarch as an Alexander, and such Ministers as Count Woronzoff and Prince Czartorinsky, should appoint a Count Markof to a high and important post, was not unexpected by any one not ignorant of his merit.

Count Markof was, early in the reign of Catherine II., employed in the office of the foreign department at St. Petersburg, and was, whilst young, entrusted with several important negotiations at the Courts of Berlin and Vienna., when Prussia had proposed the first partition of Poland. He afterward went on his travels, from which he was recalled to fill the place of an Ambassador to the late King of Sweden, Gustavus III. He was succeeded, in 1784, at Stockholm, by Count Muschin Puschin, after being appointed a Secretary of State in his own country, a post he occupied with distinction, until the death of Catherine II., when Paul the First revenged upon him, as well as on most others of the faithful servants of this Princess, his discontent with his mother. He was then exiled to his estates, where he retired with the esteem of all those who had known him. In 1801, immediately after his accession to the throne, Alexander invited Count Markof to his Court and Council, and the trusty but difficult task of representing a legitimate Sovereign at the Court of our upstart usurper was conferred on him. I imagine that I see the great surprise of this nobleman, when, for the first time, he entered the audience-chamber of our little great man, and saw him fretting, staring, swearing, abusing to right and to left, for one smile conferring twenty frowns, and for one civil word making use of fifty hard expressions, marching in the diplomatic audience as at the head of his troops, and commanding foreign Ambassadors as his French soldiers. I have heard that the report of Count Markof to his Court, describing this new and rare show, is a *chef-d'oeuvre* of wit, equally amusing and instructive. He is said to have requested of his Cabinet new and particular orders how to act—whether as the representative of an independent Sovereign, or, as most of the other members

of the foreign diplomatic corps in France, like a valet of the First Consul; and that, in the latter case, he implored as a favour, an immediate recall; preferring, had he no other choice left, sooner to work in the mines at Siberia than to wear, in France the disgraceful fetters of a Bonaparte. His subsequent dignified conduct proves the answer of his Court.

Talleyrand's craft and dissimulation could not delude the sagacity of Count Markof, who was, therefore, soon less liked by the Minister than by the First Consul. All kind of low, vulgar, and revolutionary chicanery was made use of to vex or to provoke the Russian Ambassador. Sometimes he was reproached with having emigrants in his service; another time protection was refused to one of his secretaries, under pretence that he was a Sardinian subject. Russian travellers were insulted, and detained on the most frivolous pretences. Two Russian noblemen were even arrested on our side of the Rhine, because Talleyrand had forgotten to sign his name to their passes, which were otherwise in order. The fact was that our Minister suspected them of carrying some papers which he wanted to see, and, therefore, wrote his name with an ink of such a composition that, after a certain number of days, everything written with it disappeared. Their effects and papers were strictly searched by an agent preceding them from this capital, but nothing was found, our Minister being misinformed by his spies.

When Count Markof left Sweden, he carried with him an actress of the French theatre at Stockholm, Madame Hus, an Alsatian by birth, but who had quitted her country twelve years before the Revolution, and could, therefore, never be included among emigrants. She had continued as a mistress with this nobleman, is the mother of several children by him, and an agreeable companion to him, who has never been married. As I have often said, Talleyrand is much obliged to any foreign diplomatic agent who allows him to be the indirect provider or procurer of his mistresses. After in vain tempting Count Markof with new objects, he introduced to the acquaintance of Madame Hus some of his female emissaries. Their manoeuvres, their insinuations, and even their presents were all thrown away. The lady remained the faithful friend, and therefore refused with indignation to degrade herself into a spy on her lover. Our Minister then first discovered that, not only was Madame Hus

an emigrant, but had been a great benefactress and constant companion of emigrants at St. Petersburg, and, of course, deserved to be watched, if not punished. Count Markof is reported to have said to Talleyrand on this grave subject, in the presence of two other foreign Ambassadors:

"Apropos! what shall I do to prevent my poor Madame Hus from being shot as an emigrant, and my poor children from becoming prematurely orphans?"

"Monsieur," said our diplomatic oracle, "she should have petitioned the First Consul for a permission to return, to France before she entered it; but out of regard for you, if she is prudent, she will not, I daresay, be troubled by our Government."

"I should be sorry if she was not," replied the Count, with a significant look; and here this grand affair ended, to the great entertainment of those foreign agents who dared to smile or to laugh.

LETTER XXV.

PARIS, October, 1805.

MY LORD:—The Legion of Honour, though only proclaimed upon Bonaparte's assumption of the Imperial rank, dates from the first year of his consulate. To prepare the public mind for a progressive elevation of himself, and for consequential distinctions among all classes of his subjects, he distributed among the military, arms of honour, to which were attached precedence and privileges granted by him, and, therefore, liable to cease with his power or life. The number of these arms increased in proportion to the approach of the period fixed for the change of his title and the erection of his throne. When he judged them numerous enough to support his changes, he made all these wearers of arms of honour knights. Never before were so many chevaliers created en masse; they amounted to no less than twenty-two thousand four hundred, distributed in the different corps of different armies, but principally in the army of England. To these were afterwards joined five thousand nine hundred civil functionaries, men of letters, artists, etc. To remove, however, all ideas of equality, even among the members of the Legion of Honour, they were divided into four classes—grand officers, commanders, officers, and simple legionaries.

Every one who has observed Bonaparte's incessant endeavours to intrude himself among the Sovereigns of Europe, was convinced that he would cajole, or force, as many of them as he could into his revolutionary knighthood; but I heard men, who are not ignorant of the selfishness and corruption of our times, deny the possibility of any independent Prince suffering his name to be registered among criminals of every description, from the thief who picked the pockets of his fellow citizens in the street, down to the regicide who sat in judgment and condemned his King; from the plunderers who have laid waste provinces, republics, and kingdoms, down to the assassins who shot, drowned, or guillotined their countrymen en masse. For my part, I never had but one opinion, and, unfortunately, it has turned out a just one. I always was convinced that those

Princes who received other presents from Bonaparte could have no plausible excuse to decline his ribands, crosses, and stars. But who could have presumed to think that, in return for these blood-stained baubles, they would have sacrificed those honourable and dignified ornaments which, for ages past, have been the exclusive distinction of what birth had exalted, virtue made eminent, talents conspicuous, honour illustrious, or valour meritorious? Who would have dared to say that the Prussian Eagle and the Spanish Golden Fleece should thus be prostituted, thus polluted? I do not mean by this remark to throw any blame on the conferring those and other orders on Napoleon Bonaparte, or even on his brothers; I know it is usual, between legitimate Sovereigns in alliance, sometimes to exchange their knighthoods; but to debase royal orders so much as to present them to a Cambaceres, a Talleyrand, a Fouché, a Bernadotte, a Fesch, and other vile and criminal wretches, I do not deny to have excited my astonishment as well as my indignation. What honest—I do not say what noble—subjects of Prussia, or of Spain, will hereafter think themselves rewarded for their loyalty, industry, patriotism, or zeal, when they remember that their Sovereigns have nothing to give but what the rebel has obtained, the robber worn, the murderer vilified, and the regicide debased?

The number of grand officers of the Legion of Honour does not yet amount to more than eighty, according to a list circulated at Milan last spring, of which I have seen a copy. Of these grand officers, three had been shoemakers, two tailors, four bakers, four barbers, six friars, eight abbés, six officers, three pedlars, three chandlers, seven drummers, sixteen soldiers, and eight regicides; four were lawful Kings, and the six others, Electors or Princes of the most ancient houses in Europe. I have looked over our own official list, and, as far as I know, the calculation is exact, both with regard to the number and to the quality.

This new institution of knighthood produced a singular effect on my vain and giddy, countrymen, who, for twelve years before, had scarcely seen a star or a riband, except those of foreign Ambassadors, who were frequently insulted when wearing them. It became now the fashion to be a knight, and those who really were not so, put pinks, or rather blooms, or flowers of a darker red, in their but-

tonholes, so as to resemble, and to be taken at a distance for, the red ribands of the members of the Legion of Honour.

A man of the name of Villeaume, an engraver by profession, took advantage of this knightly fashion and mania, and sold for four louis d'or, not only the stars, but pretended letters of knighthood, said to be procured by his connection with persons of the household of the Emperor. In a month's time, according to a register kept by him, he had made twelve hundred and fifty knights. When his fraud was discovered, he was already out of the way, safe with his money; and, notwithstanding the researches of the police, has not since been taken.

A person calling himself Baron von Rinken, a subject and an agent of one of the many Princes of Hohenlohe, according to his own assertion, arrived here with real letters and patents of knighthood, which he offered for sale for three hundred livres. The stars of this Order were as large as the star of the grand officers of the Legion of Honour, and nearly resembled it; but the ribands were of a different colour. He had already disposed of a dozen of these stars, when he was taken up by the police and shut up in the Temple, where he still remains. Four other agents of inferior petty German Princes have also been arrested for offering the Orders of their Sovereigns for sale.

A Captain Rouvais, who received six wounds in his campaign under Pichegru in 1794, wore the star of the Legion of Honour without being nominated a knight. He has been tried by a military commission, deprived of his pension, and condemned to four years' imprisonment in irons. He proved that he had presented fourteen petitions to Bonaparte for obtaining this mark of distinction, but in vain; while hundreds of others, who had hardly seen an enemy, or, at the most, made but one campaign, or been once wounded, had succeeded in their demands. As soon as sentence had been pronounced against him, he took a small pistol from his pocket, and shot himself through the head, saying, "Some one else will soon do the same for Bonaparte."

A cobbler, of the name of Matthieu, either in a fit of madness or from hatred to the new order of things, decorated himself with the large riband of the Legion of Honour, and had an old star fastened

on his coat. Thus accoutred, he went into the Palais Royal, in the middle of the day, got upon a chair, and began to speak to his audience of the absurdity of true republicans not being on a level, even under an Emperor, and putting on, like him, all his ridiculous ornaments. "We are here," said he, "either all grand officers, or there exist no grand officers at all; we have all fought and paid for liberty, and for the Revolution, as much as Bonaparte, and have, therefore, the same right and claim with him." Here a police agent and some gendarmes interrupted his eloquence by taking him into custody. When Fouché asked him what he meant by such rebellious behaviour, he replied that it was only a trial to see whether destiny had intended him to become an Emperor or to remain a cobbler. On the next day he was shot as a conspirator. I saw the unfortunate man in the Palais Royal; his eyes looked wild, and his words were often incoherent. He was certainly a subject more deserving a place in a madhouse than in a tomb.

Cambaceres has been severely reprimanded by the Emperor for showing too much partiality for the Royal Prussian Black Eagle, by wearing it in preference to the Imperial Legion of Honour. He was given to understand that, except for four days in the year, the Imperial etiquette did not permit any subjects to display their knight-hood of the Prussian Order. In Madame Bonaparte's last drawing-room, before His Imperial Majesty set out for the Rhine, he was ornamented with the Spanish, Neapolitan, Prussian, and Portuguese orders, together with those of the French Legion of Honour and of the Italian Iron Crown. I have seen the Emperor Paul, who was also an amateur of ribands and stars, but never with so many at once. I have just heard that the Grand Master of Malta has presented Napoleon with the Grand Cross of the Maltese Order. This is certainly a negative compliment to him, who, in July, 1798, officially declared to his then sectaries, the Turks and Mussulmans, "that the Grand Master, Commanders, Knights, and Order of Malta existed no more."

I have heard it related for a certainty among our fashionable ladies, that the Empress of the French also intends to institute a new order of female knighthood, not of honour, but of confidence; of which all our Court ladies, all the wives of our generals, public functionaries, etc., are to be members. The Imperial Princesses of the

Bonaparte family are to be hereditary grand officers, together with as many foreign Empresses, Queens, Princesses, Countesses, and Baronesses as can be bayoneted into this revolutionary sisterhood. Had the Continent remained tranquil, it would already have been officially announced by a *Senatus Consultum*. I should suppose that Madame Bonaparte, with her splendid Court and brilliant retinue of German Princes and Electors at Strasburg, need only say the word to find hundreds of princely recruits for her knighthood in petto. Her mantle, as a Grand Mistress of the Order of CONFIDENCE, has been already embroidered at Lyons, and those who have seen it assert that it is truly superb. The diamonds of the star on the mantle are valued at six hundred thousand livres.

LETTER XXVI.

PARIS, October, 1805.

MY LORD:—Since Bonaparte's departure for Germany, fifteen individuals have been brought here, chained, from La Vendee and the—Western Departments, and are imprisoned in the Temple. Their crime is not exactly known, but private letters from those countries relate that they were recruiting for another insurrection, and that some of them were entrusted as Ambassadors from their discontented countrymen to Louis XVIII. to ask for his return to France, and for the assistance of Russia, Sweden, and England to support his claims.

These are, however, reports to which I do not affix much credit. Had the prisoners in the Temple been guilty, or only accused of such crimes, they would long ago have been tortured, tried, and executed, or executed without a trial. I suppose them mere hostages arrested by our Government, as security for the tranquillity of the Chouan Departments during our armies' occupation elsewhere. We have, nevertheless, two movable columns of six thousand men each in the country, or in its vicinity, and it would be not only impolitic, but a cruelty, to engage or allure the unfortunate people of these wretched countries into any plots, which, situated as affairs now are, would be productive of great and certain evil to them, without even the probability of any benefit to the cause of royalty and of the Bourbons. I do not mean to say that there are not those who rebel against Bonaparte's tyranny, or that the Bourbons have no friends; on the contrary, the latter are not few, and the former very numerous. But a kind of apathy, the effect of unavailing resistance to usurpation and oppression, has seized on most minds, and annihilated what little remained of our never very great public spirit. We are tired of everything, even of our existence, and care no more whether we are governed by a Maximilian Robespierre or by a Napoleon Bonaparte, by a Barras or by Louis XVIII. Except, perhaps, among the military, or among some ambitious schemers, remnants of former factions, I do not believe a Moreau, a Macdonald, a Lucien

Bonaparte, or any person exiled by the Emperor, and formerly popular, could collect fifty trusty conspirators in all France; at least, as long as our armies are victorious, and organized in their present formidable manner. Should anything happen to our present chief, an impulse may be given to the minds now sunk down, and raise our characters from their present torpid state. But until such an event, we shall remain as we are, indolent but submissive, sacrificing our children and treasures for a cause we detest, and for a man we abhor. I am sorry to say it, but it certainly does, no honour to my nation when one million desperados of civil and military banditti are suffered to govern, tyrannize, and pillage, at their ease and undisturbed, thirty millions of people, to whom their past crimes are known, and who have every reason to apprehend their future wickedness.

This astonishing resignation (if I can call it so, and if it does not deserve a worse name), is so much the more incomprehensible, as the poverty of the higher and middle classes is as great as the misery of the people, and, except those employed under Bonaparte, and some few upstart contractors or army commissaries, the greatest privations must be submitted to in order to pay the enormous taxes and make a decent appearance. I know families of five, six, and seven persons, who formerly were wealthy, and now have for a scanty subsistence an income of twelve or eighteen hundred livres—per year, with which they are obliged to live as they can, being deprived of all the resource that elsewhere labour offers to the industrious, and all the succours compassion bestows on the necessitous. You know that here all trade and all commerce are at a stand or destroyed, and the hearts of our modern rich are as unfeeling as their manners are vulgar and brutal.

A family of *ci-devant* nobles of my acquaintance, once possessing a revenue of one hundred and fifty thousand livres—subsist now on fifteen hundred livres—per year; and this sum must support six individuals—the father and mother, with four children! It does so, indeed, by an arrangement of only one poor meal in the day; a dinner four times, and a supper three times, in the week. They endure their distress with tolerable cheerfulness, though in the same street, where they occupy the garrets of a house, resides, in an elegant hotel, a man who was once their groom, but who is now a tribune,