

1-1-2009

To François-Charles-Joseph Napoleon, Born at the Chateau des Tuileries March 20th, 1811.

Christopher Meinhardt

Genevieve Pocius

Follow this and additional works at: <https://via.library.depaul.edu/napoleon>

Recommended Citation

Meinhardt, Christopher and Pocius, Genevieve. (2009) To François-Charles-Joseph Napoleon, Born at the Chateau des Tuileries March 20th, 1811. .
<https://via.library.depaul.edu/napoleon/9>

This Translation is brought to you for free and open access by the French Program at Via Sapientiae. It has been accepted for inclusion in Napoleon Translations by an authorized administrator of Via Sapientiae. For more information, please contact digitalservices@depaul.edu.

**To François-Charles-Joseph Napoleon,
Born at the Chateau des Tuileries
March 20th, 1811.**

Paris
the *Marchands de Nouveautés*
August 1821.
From *l'imprimerie de doublet, rue Git-le-Coeur*

Translated by Christopher Meinhardt and Genevieve Pocius

Translators' Introduction

Napoleon II, titled “His Majesty the King of Rome,” was the son of Napoleon Bonaparte and his second wife Marie Louise of Austria. He was born in Paris on March 20th, 1811 and named the heir-apparent to the French empire by his father. After Bonaparte’s initial exile to Elba in 1814, Napoleon II was not named the successor to the throne at the insistence of Emperor Alexander I of Russia. The toddler and his mother sought refuge in Vienna, where he was to spend most of his short life. Napoleon I returned from exile on March 20th, 1815 for his “Hundred Days” reign, culminating in his defeat at the Battle of Waterloo. He was subsequently exiled to the remote island Saint Helena. He officially abdicated in favor of his son, who still resided in Austria, but a Commission of Government never called on Napoleon II to take the throne, opting instead to restore King Louis XVIII to power.

Napoleon II, who by 1815 was known as “Franz,” was named the Duke of Reichstadt in 1818. Living in Austria for the majority of his life, taking an Austrian name, and holding a position of power in Austrian nobility, Bonaparte’s son was essentially more Austrian than French. Some historians argue that there was a conscious effort made on the part of his caretakers to sever Napoleon II from his French roots, although letters from Napoleon II to his mother, as well as from his advisors, do not necessarily confirm this idea. The Duke of Reichstadt died in Vienna on July 22nd, 1832 from an illness that was most likely tuberculosis.

French politician and writer Ferdinand Flocon wrote an open letter to Napoleon II in August 1821, three months after the death of Napoleon Bonaparte. This letter, although specifically addressed to Napoleon II, was a way to describe the effects Napoleon’s death had on his son as well as the French people. Having the letter addressed to the ten-year-old Napoleon allowed Flocon to humanize Napoleon the emperor, but the letter also reinforced the myth surrounding Napoleon and his glory: he would not just be another political figure who came and went unremembered. His legacy would live on in the hearts of the French people for all time.

Son of Napoleon, born to the highest throne of the world, and now banished, listen to the voice of a young Frenchman who has already shed many tears over the misfortunes of his homeland, over your own, and those of your father.

Misfortune unites men across generations. If you were born to a higher rank than I, it was so that you would know greater suffering; if I drank before you from the cup of life, it was to know bitterness earlier.

You were born in a palace: I spent my childhood in a simple cottage. Alas! Neither the obscurity of my life nor the splendor of yours guarantees us protection from the blows of fate! The sufferings of the fatherland fall to each of his children.

Twice have I seen French soil defiled by foreign soldiers' footsteps, and twice have their arms imposed upon us shame and slavery. And, still too young, I did not have the glorious right to die at the hands of the enemy!

Your first years on earth have also known tears. In vain you clung to your native soil, in vain your weak arms grasped at the palace threshold. The enemy was there. You had no choice but to leave.¹

To leave! Abandon France, the throne and your father! Leave them forever!When he was placed in the chariot that was to take him away, the child ceased his crying, and kept silent.

He did not say a word when he learned of his father's death. His eye was dry, his heart brimming. Motionless, a long silence was his response to this fatal news.

He remained somber and alone. A few murmurs escaped his lips; but none could comprehend these strange sounds, nor the pressing thoughts that filled his soul.

Suddenly a look of terror colors his face; he lets out a cry, a cry of horror!.....We listen, he closes his lips, but his hair is bristling, his eyes are wild, his entire body trembling.

It was not the effect of an acute pain. Rather, some said that a sudden revelation had come from the grave, to reveal a terrible secret to Napoleon's son.

• • • • •

Time passes; things change; men perish; memories fade. Yes, this is the case for the vulgar man, or for the sad progeny of a degenerate race.

But the soul of a hero lives on in his son; inalterable, it forever bears the mark of momentous events. A violin string appears silent, but you have only to touch it and it will sing the same song as it ever did.

The name of Napoleon is engraved in the hearts of all the French people, although it may evoke different feelings², but the pain of his death will never pass from the heart of his son; it will preside there for the rest of his life.

¹ Napoleon II was still a toddler when his father was exiled to Elba following the War of the Sixth Coalition. He was not recognized as the heir to the throne after Napoleon's removal, so he was forced to flee to Austria with his mother. (TR— all notes are the translators' unless otherwise indicated)

² Napoleon I was heralded by some as the savior of the French Revolution, while others saw him as a return to dictatorship. Bonaparte led the French military to great victories and expanded the French Empire across the European continent, but many of the French grew tired of constant warfare and the strain that it put on their economy and society. After his death, Napoleon was initially buried at Saint Helena, the

Poor orphan! What destiny lies ahead for you? Are the poisonous seeds of death already sewn in your breast? And must you, like your father, succumb to it before your time?³

Ah! Happier at least, you will see your country again, you will traverse this sacred earth, and a simple traveler, lost in the crowd, contemplate in silence the sky that witnessed your birth.⁴

You will be able to do this without fear. Our rulers have not always lived in palaces: they too have known exile and suffering. Moreover, they are so strong, what would they have to fear from an orphan, the son of a banished man?

So, go to the peasant's dwelling, there you will find Napoleon's old soldier: you will hear the truth, and will be able to understand it: for flattery will not have corrupted your soul. Who would deign to flatter a prince without a crown?

As for those whom your father showered with honors, glory, and riches, those whom he pulled out of nothingness, whom he brought to the summit of power, avert your eyes, and pass them by.

No, look at them instead; for then you will no longer miss the throne, and you will bless the misfortune that robs you of the cares of such men.

• • • • •

Son of Napoleon, farewell! This young Frenchman can say no more to you; but whatever fate has in store for you, remember to learn from the faults and, above all, the virtues of your father.

Napoleon, farewell!

Ferdinand Flocon⁵

location of his final exile, but in 1840 he was once again recognized as a national hero when his body was returned to Paris, and a state funeral was held.

³ In fact, Napoleon II did "succumb to it" before his time. He died in 1832 at the age of 21.

⁴ This passage is ironic considering that Napoleon II spent the majority of his life in Austria, and was almost completely Germanized by the time of his death in 1832.

⁵ Ferdinand Flocon (1800-1866) was known throughout France as a stenographer, parliamentary reporter, novelist, translator, and newspaper editor. Flocon was highly active in French political life and was a staunch supporter of the Republic, holding in high regard Robespierre's ideals of human rights and equality that formed the basis of the French Revolution.