

Document 5.12

From Emmanuel, comte de Las Cases,

Memoirs of the Life, Exile, and Conversations of the Emperor Napoleon

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After dinner, he looked over a few of the addresses, proclamations, or acts, in Goldsmith's imperfect collection. The perusal of some of these documents seemed to interest him; then, laying down the book, he began to walk about, and said, "After all, let them abridge, suppress, and mutilate as much as they please, they will find it very difficult to throw me entirely into the shade. The historian of France cannot pass over the Empire, and if he has any honesty, he will not fail to render me my share of justice. His task will be easy; for the facts speak for themselves: they shine like the sun."

"I closed the gulf of anarchy and cleared the chaos. I purified the Revolution, dignified Nations and established Kings. I excited every kind of emulation, rewarded every kind of merit, and extended the limits of glory! This is at least something! And on what point can I be assailed on which an historian could not defend me? Can it be for my intentions? But even here I can find absolution. Can it be for my despotism? It may be demonstrated that the Dictatorship was absolutely necessary. Will it be said that I restrained liberty? It can be proved that licentiousness, anarchy, and the greatest irregularities, still haunted the threshold of freedom. Shall I be accused of having been too fond of war? It can be shown that I always received the first attack. Will it be said that I aimed at universal monarchy? It can be proved that this was merely the result of fortuitous circumstances, and that our enemies themselves led me step by step to this determination. Lastly, shall I be blamed for my ambition? This passion I must doubtless be allowed to have possessed, and that in no small degree; but, at the same time, my ambition was of the highest and noblest kind that ever, perhaps, existed — that of establishing and of consecrating the empire of reason, and the full exercise and complete enjoyment of all the human faculties! And here the historian will probably feel compelled to regret that such ambition should not have been fulfilled and gratified." Then after a few moments of silent reflection: "This," said the Emperor, "is my whole history in a few words."

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"The French Revolution was not produced by the jarring interests of two families disputing the possession of the throne; it was a general rising of the mass of the nation against the privileged classes. The French nobility, like that of every country in Europe, dates its origin from the incursion of the barbarians, who divided the Roman Empire among them. In France, nobles represented the Franks, and the Burgundians, and the rest of the nation, the Gauls. The feudal system which was introduced established the principle that all land should have a lord. All political privileges were exercised by the Priests and the Nobles; the peasants were slaves... The progress of civilization and knowledge emancipated the people. This new state of things promoted industry and trade. The chief portion of the land, wealth, and information, belonged to the people in the eighteenth century. The nobles, however, still continued to be a privileged class: they were empowered to administer justice, and they possessed feudal rights under various denominations and forms: they enjoyed the privilege of being exempt from all the burdens of the state, and of possessing exclusively the most honorable posts. These abuses aroused the indignation of the citizens. The principal object of the Revolution was to destroy all privileges... to suppress feudal rights; as being a remnant of the old slavery of the people... In short, the Revolution proclaimed equality of rights. A citizen might attain any public employment, according to his talent and the chances of fortune. The kingdom was composed of provinces which had been united to the Crown at various periods: they had no natural limits, and were differently divided, unequal in extent and in population. They possessed many laws of their own, civil as well as criminal: they were more or less privileged, and very unequally taxed, both with respect to the amount and the nature of the

contributions, which rendered it necessary to detach them from each other by lines of custom-houses. France was not a state, but a combination of several states, connected together without amalgamation. The whole had been determined by chance and by the events of past ages. The Revolution, guided by the principle of equality, both with respect to the citizens and the different portions of the territory, destroyed all these small nations: there was no longer a Brittany, a Normandy, a Burgundy, a Champagne, a Provence, or a Lorraine; but the whole formed a France....

On the Directory

The five members of the Directory were divided. Enemies to the Republic crept into the councils; and thus men, hostile to the rights of the people, became connected with the government. This state of things kept the country in a ferment; and the great interests which the French people had acquired by the Revolution were incessantly compromised. One unanimous voice, issuing from the plains of France and from her cities and her camps, demanded the preservation of all the principles of the Republic, or the establishment of a hereditary system of government, which would place the principles and interests of the Revolution beyond the reach of factions and the influence of foreigners. By the Constitution of the Year VIII, the First Consul of the Republic became Consul for ten years, and the nation afterwards prolonged his magistracy for life: the people subsequently raised him to the throne, which it rendered hereditary in his family. The principles of the sovereignty of the people, of liberty and equality, of the destruction of the feudal system, of the irrevocability of the sale of national domains, and the freedom of religious worship, were now established. The government of France, under the fourth dynasty, was founded on the same principles as the Republic. It was a moderate and constitutional monarchy. There was as much difference between the government of France under the fourth dynasty and the third, as between the latter and the Republic. The fourth dynasty succeeded the Republic, or, more properly speaking, it was merely a modification of it.

No Prince ever ascended a throne with rights more legitimate than those of Napoleon. The crown was not presented to him by a few Bishops and Nobles; but he was raised to the Imperial throne by the unanimous consent of the citizens, three times solemnly confirmed. Pope Pius VII, the head of the Catholic religion, the religion of the majority of the French people, crossed the Alps to anoint the Emperor with his own hands, in the presence of the Bishops of France, the Cardinals of the [Catholic] Church, and the Deputies from all the districts of the Empire. The sovereigns of Europe eagerly acknowledged Napoleon: all beheld with pleasure the modification of the Republic, which placed France on a footing of harmony with the rest of Europe, and which at once confirmed the constitution and the happiness of that great nation. Ambassadors from Austria, Russia, Prussia, Spain, Portugal, Turkey, and America, in fine, from all the powers of Europe, came to congratulate the Emperor. England alone sent no ambassador: she had violated the treaty of Amiens, and had consequently again declared war against France; but even England approved the change.