

CANOVA.*

TRANSLATED FROM THE ITALIAN, BY M. MORGAN, M. D. SURGEON U. S. NAVY.

Another day the conversation turned on a delicate subject. It was that of the Pope and his government. I could not restrain myself from speaking freely; and I am astonished that Napoleon heard me patiently. But it always appeared to me, that he was far from being tyrannical; and had only been sometimes deceived by those who tried to hide from him the truth. The subject was of my benefactor, Pope Pius VII.

I said, "Why does not your Majesty become reconciled in some way to the Pope?"

"Because," he replied, "the priests wish to rule in every thing. They must meddle with every thing, and wish to become masters in every thing, as Gregory VII was."

"I think there is no danger of that," I replied, "as your Majesty is master of every thing."

"The Popes," he replied, "have prostrated the Italian nations, and rule Rome like the Calonnese and the Orsini."

"Certainly," I said, "if they had the courage and abilities of your Majesty, they might make themselves masters of Italy."

"They want this," said he, putting his hand on his sword, "this is what they want."

"It is true," I said, "we have seen it in Alexander VI—the Duke Valentine—Julius II, and Leo X: but they are mostly elected when very old; and if one has spirit to undertake, his successor is inactive."

"They want the sword," he replied.

"Not only that," said I, "but the staff of authority of the Augurs. Machiavelli himself was undecided which had contributed most to the aggrandizement of Rome—the arms of Romulus or the religion of Numa—so true it is that these two must be united. If the Popes, however, have not signalized themselves in arms, they have performed other illustrious actions, which must excite the admiration of all."

"These Romans were a great people," he exclaimed. "Certainly they were a great people—even to the end of the second Punic war. Caesar—Caesar was a great man—not only Caesar, but many of the other Emperors, as Titus, Trajan, Marcus Aurelius—always—always the Romans were great, even to the time of Constantine. The Popes did wrong," he said, "in keeping up discord in Italy—in being the first to call in the French and Germans. They were not capable of being soldiers themselves, and had lost enough."

"Since it is so," I said, "I hope your Majesty will not suffer our misfortunes to increase. And your Majesty will permit me to say, that if your Majesty does not assist Rome, it will become what it was in the times when the Popes were transferred to Avignon.—Notwithstanding the immense number of fountains and abundance of water at that period, the carriers broke them up and sold the water of the Tiber in the streets, and the city became almost a desert."

He seemed agitated at this, and said with great emphasis—"They oppose me; and why? I am master of France, of Italy, and of three-fourths of Germany. I am the successor of Charlemagne. If the Popes were as they then were, all would be compromised. You Venetians too broke off from the Popes."

"Not as your Majesty," I replied. "Your Majesty is already so great, you can afford a place to the Pope where he can feel himself independent, and where he can freely exercise his ministry."

"Why I do let him do every thing as long as he confines himself to religious concerns. The Imperial Minister never interferes with him, except when he publishes something which does not please the French government; and then he is quickly punished. Have I not given the Bishops all the power they could wish? There is no religion here perhaps? Who has raised the altars? Who has protected the clergy?"

"If your Majesty," I replied, "have religious subjects, they will be more affectionate and obedient subjects."

"I wish it," he rejoined, "but the Pope is all German"—and in saying this he looked at the Empress.

"And I assure you," said she, "that when I was in Germany, they there said that the Pope was altogether French."

"He would not," said the Emperor, "drive away the Russians and English from his state; and for this we broke him up."

I here wished to remind him of the published defence of the Pope; but Marshal Duroc entered; Napoleon, however, still went on.

"And he has pretended to excommunicate me!—Does he know that in the end we may become as the English and the Russians?"

"I humbly beg pardon of your Majesty, but my zeal has inspired me with confidence to speak freely; and allow me to say, it does not comport with your Majesty's interest, in my opinion, to have the present state of things. God grant you many years: but in after times, if a strong party should take the side of the Pope, it might occasion great troubles in France. In short, your Majesty will soon be a father. A permanent state of things is desirable. For merey's sake, Sire, accommodate matters in some way."

"You wish matters settled, then," said Napoleon; "and I wish it too; but you see what the Romans were without Popes."

"But think, Sire, what religious devotion they had when they were great. That Caesar, so famed, ascended the stairs of the Capitol on his knees to the temple of Jupiter. They never gave battle without auspicious religious omens, or they were so cautious about it, that if it were neglected, the general was punished. See what was done in the case of Marcellus for sacred shings, when the Consul was condemned for carrying away only a tile from the temple of Jove in Magna Græcia. For charity protect religion and its head—preserve the beautiful church of Italy and of Rome—it is more delightful to adore than to fear."

"We desire that," said he, and the conversation ended.

At another time he spoke of Venice, of its artists and monuments, and asked me about the architects. I named to him the principal ones, with proper commendation. Soli, who directed the new works there, but who had been prevented from finishing his beautiful edifices as he planned them. I mentioned Palladeo, and spoke of his pictures with which he had illustrated the Commentaries of Caesar, and of his beautiful works which abound in the Venetian state; and while I was speaking of Venice, and asking for her his protection, my emotions overpowered me, and I burst into tears. "I declare to your Majesty the Venetians are a good people. They are truly a good people; but they are very unfortunate: commerce is interrupted, the taxes are high, and in some districts they are even in want of the necessaries of life. From Passeriana they sent an eloquent petition to your Majesty, but I know not whether it ever reached your Majesty."

"No," he replied:

"I have it here, if your Majesty would see it." I took it out of my portfolio, and presented it to him. It was as follows:

"To His Majesty the Emperor of France and King of Italy.

"SIRE,

"The inhabitants of the Department of Passireana, with all Italy, are subjects of your Majesty, and worthy of the good fortune of being so. Of three hundred and seventy thousand inhabitants, more than two thirds are destitute and unemployed. The revulsion of the times has entirely destroyed the productiveness of property. Sire, his Royal Highness the Viceroy, moved at such misfortunes, has promised some relief. His word is sacred, but if aid be much longer deferred, it will be useless. The undersigned, the most respectable people of the Department, offer their lives and the little they have left in proof of what they have asserted. Who dare and who would deceive your Majesty? Before changing from proprietors to labourers, they divided with their children their bread bathed in tears; and now raise their voices to your throne. Sire, they are perishing—they make you acquainted with it, and will receive your benediction."

Napoleon looked at it, and said, "It is short." He then stopped eating, read it, and added—"I will speak of it to Aldini"—and placing it near him, took it away after he had done eating.

While speaking of Venice, I adverted to the form and spirit of the Government; and observed, that after the publication of the works of Machiavelli, it did not appear possible for Venice to fall. That great diplomatist, when Minister from Florence to the Emperor of Germany, wrote to his friend Vettor Vettori, and said, "It appears to me that the Venetians understood things well when they painted St. Mark with the sword as well as the book, because the book is not enough." And I observed that the Venetians were afraid of a Caesar rising up among them, they were jealous and cautious of a General on land.

"Certainly," replied the Emperor, "the prolongation of command is a very dangerous thing. I told the Directory myself that if they were continually at war, the power would fall into the hands of one person."

On another occasion, conversing of Florence, he asked me "where was the monument of Alfieri placed?"

"In Santa Croce," I replied, "where those of Michael Angelo and Machiavelli also were erected."

"Who paid for it?" he asked.

"The Countess of Albany," I answered.

"Who paid for that of Machiavelli?"

"I believe a society."

"And that of Galileo?"

"His relatives, if I am not mistaken."

"The church," I said, "of Santa Croce is in a bad condition: the rain comes through the roof, and it wants repairs; and for the glory of your Majesty, preserve the fine monuments and buildings. The Dome, too, at Florence, begins to decay for want of attention. The church is full of beautiful works of art; and I am charged with a petition to your Majesty, not to suffer these precious things to be sold to the Jews."

"How sold? They shall be brought here," said he.

"They cannot be removed," I replied; they are works in fresco. It would be well for the President of the Academy to make some provision for their preservation."

"I wish it," he said.

"This," said I, "will add to your Majesty's glory; the more so, as your family is originally from Florence."

At this, Maria Louisa looked round, and said, "Are you not then a Corsican?"

"Yes," said he, "but of Florentine origin."

I then added that the President of the Academy was Senator Alexander, of one of the most illustrious families in Florence, which was connected by marriage with a branch of his Majesty's. "You are an Italian, and we Italians boast of it."

"I certainly am," he replied.

I then recommended to his attention the Academy of Florence.

On another occasion I spoke earnestly to him of the Academy of St. Luke, at Rome: of its destitute state—without a school—without conveniences and revenues; and urged that it ought to be placed on the same footing as that of Milan; and said to him, "If your Majesty would have two singers less at the opera, and gave their salaries to St. Luke, it would do more good;" and I said this because I knew that the Cres-contini were then paid thirty-six thousand francs a-year. To this I found him well disposed.

I then wrote to Menneval, his private secretary, that the Emperor was beneficently inclined to aid the arts of Rome; that he had promised a decree to that effect; and that I should therefore like soon to return to Rome. On the 8th November, I received through the Minister Marescalchi, a letter from Menneval, containing the generous disposition of his Majesty for the Roman Academy.

Speaking of the Academy and Roman artists, Napoleon said, "The Italian painters are bad—we have better in France."

I replied that it was many years seen I had seen the works of the French painters, and could not compare them with ours, but that we still had great artists in this branch in Italy—Camuccini, at Rome; Landiat, at Florence; Benevenuti, at Milan; Appiani, and Bossi, all great artists.

He said that the French were a little deficient yet in colouring; but that in design they were superior to the Italians.

I replied, ours were skilful too in design. Not to mention Camuccini, so famed, Bossi had made some divine cartoons; and that Apiani had painted the saloon of his Majesty's palace in Milan so well that it seemed impossible to improve it.

"Yes, in fresco they do well," said he, "but not in oil."

I still defended our artists, and reminded him of the great encouragement they received in France. He asked me about the saloons and works then in progress in France. I spoke in proper terms of the able French artists, and their sublime monuments.

"Have you seen," said he, "the Column in Bronze? It appears to me grand. I don't like the eagles at the corners; but that of Trajan, of which it is an imitation, also had them. Will that arch be handsome which they are constructing at the Bois de Boulogne?"

"Beautiful indeed," I replied. "Such works are truly worthy of your Majesty or of the ancient Romans, and especially in style, which is magnificent."

"In the coming year," said he, "the road of Carnice will be completed, by which they will be able to go from Paris to Genoa, without being interrupted by the snow; and I intend to make another from Parma to the Gulf of Spezia."

"These vast projects," I replied, "are worthy of the great mind of your Majesty, together with the preservation of the renowned works of antiquity."

On the evening of the 4th of November, 1810, I presented myself to the Empress with the model of her bust. She showed it to the ladies who were with her, and all approved the likeness. Napoleon was not present, and the Empress said, to-morrow at breakfast, she would show it to him. She then said to me, "And do you not wish to remain here?"