

Chapter Four

1837: The Third Visit

LOUIS NAPOLEON'S third English visit could not have been experienced under more different circumstances than his previous two. By the time he reached Hortense in the summer of 1833, most of Europe had heard of him; but only as the putative mouthpiece of what Napoleon had represented, or what they thought he had represented. Some had heard him speak; some had read his writing; a few had even seen him, skulking with that impressive brooch of his. But none had yet seen him act. That was about to change.

On 28 July 1833, Louis Philippe arrived in state at the Place Vendôme surrounded by a jubilant crowd, the National Guard, drummers, trumpeters, and Adolphe Thiers in his ministers' hat and feathers. In the centre of the square stood a tall column, 132 feet two inches high, the tip draped in a black veil. Thiers approached it on his horse, turned to Louis Philippe as he gripped the long cord, made a brief speech and pulled, revealing a small figure in a cap and grey frock coat.

The figure became St Napoleon Stylites, urging the pagan masses below to political orthodoxy and castigating Louis Philippe as he moved from the Palais Royal to the Tuileries – taking his umbrella with him, as *Le Charivari* gleefully pointed out. Napoleon became a beacon for the aimless Bonaparte hulks drifting in exilic waters. Even Joseph had his heritable conscience pricked badly enough for him to write to the Chamber of Deputies in 1834 with a signed petition demanding the abrogation of Article VI. 'The France of July has raised his statue; his family is still proscribed', he protested. 'Their only crime is to bear the name Napoleon has bequeathed them'.¹

The absurd futility of venerating Napoleon while proscribing *La Famille* was certainly known to the July Monarchy, but by then the cult was beyond its control. Louis Philippe could oppose it and be crushed, or embrace it and turn it to his advantage. His perceived strength lay in some delusional hope that the two would never fuse and turn against the high priests of the *cultus* who had helped make their union possible. After all, *La Famille* was not banished because its members did not matter but precisely because some of them did. Louis Napoleon observed to his friend Narcisse Vieillard: 'the Government banish us because the nation is not yet indifferent to us ... It is not in gilded rooms nor in the writings of a timid class that we shall find justice, but in the street'.² The measure of strength, durability, and humanity of any polity is expressed not by the number of enemies it successfully crushes or expels but by the number it absorbs and tolerates – a lesson Louis Napoleon would have to learn for himself years later. Once the Government recognized that he was a force capable of instigating political change; once it realized that it could not absorb only repel him, it was effectively inviting a challenge.

Louis Napoleon knew that he could not rely on *La Famille* to help him. Lucien may well have been one of his 'timid class', since although his writing struck the right note he had begun to ingratiate himself with Louis Philippe over proposals to return Napoleon to France and refused to participate actively. Indeed, privately he expressed very different opinions to those he had so eloquently put forward in *The Times* a year earlier. Lucien went to Holland House where Lord Holland observed:

[he] was desirous of recovering his rights as a French citizen, that he lamented and disapproved some rash expressions of his family, especially his brother Joseph and his nephew Lewis, that since the death

of the King of Rome, it was not only wrong but foolish in any of his family to keep up pretensions or foster recollections which, perhaps, it would have been well, had never been excited in that direction.³

But by this time Louis Napoleon neither needed nor wanted anything to do with his uncles. He had put out two recent publications that were doing rather well and drawing considerable attention to his name. The notes he had put together in London had resulted in the 83-page *Considérations politiques et militaires sur la Suisse*, published on his return to Arenenberg. In the autumn of the following year he produced his first true book, the *Manuel d'artillerie à l'usage des officiers d'artillerie de la République helvétique*, a historical and technical treatise of over 500 pages.

The works were significant for their author in ways unconnected with their intrinsic merit. The book on Switzerland, based on intimate knowledge of its history and traditions, earned for him the honorary captainship of artillery in the canton of Berne in July 1834. This was a rank that gave Louis Napoleon particular satisfaction, as it emulated Napoleon's first commission as 2nd lieutenant in the artillery of Louis XVI. More importantly it gave Louis Napoleon his first official rank in any country since his puerile imperial accolades. In the preface he wrote: 'If in speaking of Switzerland I have been unable to prevent the frequent recurrence of my thoughts to France, I trust that my digressions may be pardoned'. Indeed he had written the book not so much to flatter the Swiss as to make the French aware of his diamond and ruby brooch.

The artillery manual, on the other hand, at last brought Louis Napoleon to the serious attention of the British, which is exactly what he had intended. To begin with, dozens of copies of the *Manuel d'Artillerie* were sent, unsolicited, to as many officers in the French army as would not immediately destroy it, each accompanied by a polite letter of introduction expressing its author's personal regards. It was a masterstroke. Within a few months everybody in Louis Philippe's army was talking not about their king but about Louis Napoleon. By the end of the year the Paris embassy had informed the British Government about it: 'a book called the *Manuel des Artilleurs*, which is said to have some merit, and has been widely circulated among Military People, is represented to have been written by the Prince Louis'.⁴

But by then it was not news in the British army. Sir Robert Wilson had recently been reinstated as a lieutenant-general after his earlier dismissal following his actions against the mob during Queen Caroline's funeral in 1821. He had been a celebrated and loyal soldier during the Napoleonic Wars, but he was also a sympathetic Napoleonist who, with two friends, had helped the imprisoned Comte de La Valette escape from Louis XVIII in 1815, for which humanitarian gesture he had spent three months in a Bourbon prison. Hortense and Louis Napoleon had met Wilson at Holland House in 1831, and of course he was something of a hero to them. On 24 March 1836, Louis Napoleon sent Wilson – by then a colonel in the 15th Hussars – two copies of his manual: 'I am sending you a work that I have recently published; I beg you to accept it as a souvenir on my part, and I should be happy if it meets with your approval'.⁵ One copy had been for Wilson while the other was to be sent to some 'officier distingué de l'artillerie' of his own choosing in exchange for some information on recent canon technology for future reference.

Louis Bonaparte was a constant and unnecessary critic of his son. He wrote him a harsh letter complaining about the *Manuel d'Artillerie*, terrified that it might indeed precipitate something as dramatic as a Bonaparte Restoration, which would disturb his tranquil decline into sickness and death in Florence. But letters from this period reveal that something more tangible was in Louis Napoleon's mind than self-advertising, or defending himself against his familial elders. In 1835, the duke of Leuchtenberg died childless in Portugal after a brief marriage to Queen Maria II. 'To

die young is often a good fortune', wrote Louis Napoleon from Geneva, 'but to die before one has lived, to die in one's bed of sickness, without glory, that is terrible'.⁶ In July he was in Baden where he wrote to his grandmother, or Mme Mère as she was affectionately known to her large family. 'You can imagine how grateful to me is the blessing of the mother of the Emperor, for I venerate the Emperor as a god, and hold his memory in sacred esteem'.⁷ A year later he was in Baden-Baden, in the Grand Duchy of Württemberg, where he wrote to his mother: 'it is neither the pleasures nor the society that I regret [leaving], it is only that I shall no longer see France on the horizon – France which has been constantly before my eyes for the last month'.⁸

When this last letter was written, on 14 August 1836, Louis Napoleon had already been planning his *coup* for several weeks with a selection of new friends he had collected over the previous few years. The most notable of these was Jean Fialin, a sergeant major in the 4th Hussars who had been dismissed and sent into exile in 1830 for his anti-Orleanist views. After publishing a Bonapartist tract in the *Revue de l'Occident français*, Fialin was introduced to Hortense and Louis Napoleon at Arenenberg in 1835, by which time he had resurrected for himself the quasi-legitimate Napoleonic title of Vicomte de Persigny, which had fallen into abeyance, thereafter calling himself simply 'Persigny'.

The *coup* was not intended to be a second Elba or 18 Brumaire. There would be no bayonets and no 'whiff of grapeshot'. It would be with voting slips that Louis Philippe would be dislodged. Strasbourg was chosen as the point of entry where Louis Napoleon and his carefully-selected group of thirteen dedicated followers would join Colonel Claude Vaudrey, a Napoleonist of the 4th Regiment of Artillery who had seen action at Waterloo, and then march onto Paris. Singing the *Marseillaise*, they would collect every disaffected *citoyen* along the way before presenting the Citizen King with a demand for a free plebiscite based on universal manhood suffrage. France would then choose its form of government according to Murat's original plan so ably presented in Louis Napoleon's two political works.

Events turned out rather differently. The plan had been conceived with logic and skill, effectively launched and reasonably well executed; but on the day it nevertheless failed to work. Two officers of higher rank than Vaudrey had been approached first and had refused to participate. General Remi Exelmans, a former cavalry officer at Waterloo court-martialled under the Bourbons, was sympathetic, as was General Théophile Voirol, the commander of Strasbourg, but both were adamant in their refusal. Possibly through these two generals the authorities had information of the attempt beforehand, and there was a muddle *en route*. Worse still, not all the military of Strasbourg followed Louis Napoleon as he had expected, and some even refused to believe his identity, taking the whole thing for a practical joke. The small force was eventually overpowered and Louis Napoleon was arrested. In the heady and risky world of the *coup* there were no near misses, only utter shambles. However, as would soon be revealed, a shambles was still preferable to nothing at all. A few hours into the attempt, which took place on 30 October, the stifled message on the *télégraph aérien* that made the difficult journey to Paris caused considerable unease among those who would soon pretend to be unruffled by it. The *coup*, though a technical failure, projected Louis Napoleon onto the international stage and again to England, thus becoming the next best thing to complete success.

Persigny's timing of the *coup* had been poor. On 28 June 1835, Joseph Fieschi, a Corsican associate of the *Société de drets de l'homme*, with three accomplices, killed eighteen people and wounded twenty more at a military review by firing a 24-barrelled grapeshot cannon made out of rifles from behind a shuttered window near

the former Théâtre Ambigu and the Café Jardin de Turc. However, Louis Philippe was only slightly injured, as was the Duc de Broglie, president of the council. As often happened in these circumstances, the assassin, who claimed to have acted according to the popular will, was immediately condemned by the Government and Public while the popularity of his intended victim – immediately separated from his system of government – soared to levels it could not otherwise have reached. Typically there was a backlash, and Broglie's conservative ministry instituted a series of measures to ensure public order of a kind not seen since the days of the Bourbons. Moreover, these were passed in the Chambers without effective opposition; only Lamartine opposed the September Laws, as they were known, to any effect. These laws were seen to have been justified, however, when on 25 June 1836 Louis Alibaud fired at Louis Philippe with a walking-stick gun he audaciously and casually rested on the royal carriage's window frame as it passed out of the Tuileries. Nonetheless, Alibaud missed his target. Although such an arrogant attempt could never have been prevented, the speed with which he was arrested helped silence the critics of the new laws.

Fieschi and Alibaud were guillotined with popular approval. Although in such a climate there could be no question of a pardon for Louis Napoleon it was not possible in practice to execute him. The Bonaparte stricture was still technically in force, but there was, as Lord Granville observed, 'no penalty assigned for the breach of that law'.⁹ Technically this was true, since Article VI contained no reference to Article 91 of the *Code Pénal* as the Bourbon law had done. Moreover, for all practical purposes this was really reserved only for significant members of *La Famille*. Caroline Murat, for example, had managed to persuade the July Monarchy to allow her to live out the last few years of her life in Paris in spite of the stricture, although after the Strasbourg *coup* she was nevertheless obliged to leave France for Florence.

The French Government would not make the possible legal association between attempted assassination and a treasonable *coup*. Instead, it opted for what it believed would be the wiser measure of playing down the incident. The official state newspaper published a report suggesting that someone on the level of a court jester had tripped up over his own feet after having met with complete resistance by dutiful subjects loyal to their king. But this, of course, was not true at all, and Granville was able to write to Palmerston that although 'the population of Strasbourg appear to have taken no part in the projected military insurrection' they also did not actively oppose it. Instead, he noted typical French caution: 'I am told from good authority that parties of republicans linked arm in arm, appeared collectively in the streets, waiting to see whether the attempt of Louis Buonaparte and Colonel Vaudrey would occasion the defection of any considerable portion of the garrison'.¹⁰ When it did not defect, the pragmatic human chain dissolved itself.

On the day of Louis Napoleon's attempted insurrection, Bruyant, a brigadier in the hussars, and an associate of his named Thierry, attempted a Legitimist *coup* in Vendôme, southwest of Orléans. Continuing its cautious policy of *reductio ad absurdum*, the Government announced this as 'a tentative military insurrection, more vain, and more senseless than even the one at Strasbourg',¹¹ and continued to portray Louis Napoleon as a buffoon hopelessly inadequate to the task he had set himself. Granville wrote: 'I was told this morning that the young Louis Bonaparte fainted at the moment of his arrest, that he has since been continually shedding tears, and writing letters imploring the mercy of the Govt., and that these letters are ill written and ill spelt'.¹² This very French *canard* was so laughable it is difficult to believe that

anybody took serious notice of it. Granville certainly did not, finding it particularly 'extraordinary' on account of the quality of Louis Napoleon's published writings.

The French Government revealed an instinct for political survival by choosing not to try Louis Napoleon, deciding instead to transport him to America forthwith. The decision was legally dubious, and the only quasi-precedent had been with the Duchesse de Berry, who had been tried not in a public civil court but by the Chamber of Peers, which had the authority to convoke as a special court of law. At that time, François Dupin, a deputy from the Seine, had been the most vociferous in demanding she be tried publicly, in opposition to most of his colleagues as well as Louis Philippe.

With Louis Napoleon, both Dupin (a peer since 3 October) and the Comte de Lamartine led a majority to try him, but the king and Cabinet overruled them. Thiers was no longer in office, but it is unlikely that his canting presence would have led to a different result. A personal conflict between him and Louis Philippe over French involvement in the Carlist War in Spain had led to his resignation on 29 August after just seven months as president of the council. Thiers went to Italy where he met Jérôme, promising to do all he could to help the Bonaparte family to return to France in exchange for Napoleonic documents for his writing. After declaring himself the foremost Napoleonist in France, he stated: 'if I am recalled to the post that I formerly occupied, I will use my influence with the King to bring near to their fatherland the French who are banned from it'.¹³ Thiers was given the documents, but he never kept his half of the deal when, on 25 February 1840, he was recalled to the post he 'formerly occupied'.

The Government's action could conveniently masquerade as the personal clemency of Louis Philippe and also prevent a court of law from either acquitting Louis Napoleon or creating a martyr by condemning him. The Government also fabricated the clever lie that Louis Napoleon had been expelled only after having given his *parole* not to return to Europe, let alone France, knowing that sooner or later it would appear that he had broken his word and was not a man of honour. The truth was known to the British Foreign Office at once, since Granville informed Palmerston that 'Louis Napoleon Buonaparte ... will be permitted to go to the United States of America, not being even required to engage his parole not to return to France'.¹⁴ But with the uninformed public and politicians it would not be until 1840, and Louis Napoleon's trial after Boulogne, that the truth would emerge, by which time the lie had been told so often that few cared to know the truth. Moreover, this supposed act of kindness was deliberately not extended to Louis Napoleon's principal accomplices, seven of whom were put on trial, thereby putting him in the genuinely painful position of being 'free' while his friends languished in gaol. 'Against my will, I do not share the fate of those whose existence I have compromised. And so all the world will take me for a fool, a self-seeker, a coward ... I had accustomed myself to the prospect of the first two accusations; but the third is too cruel'.¹⁵

Accordingly, on 21 November, Louis Napoleon left France aboard the frigate *Andromède*. The press in England was rather muted on the whole Strasbourg business, but where mention was made it was with an aura of sympathetic melancholia: 'An immense crowd has assembled to witness the departure. At 5 p.m. the frigate was out of sight, conveying away the hopes of the partisans of an empire'.¹⁶ This romantic picture was followed by a translation of a letter Louis Napoleon had written to Hortense, who had not been allowed to see him, in which he entreated her not to follow him into the exile where he intended to make a new life for himself. 'Farewell my dear mamma; return to Arenenberg, but do not come and join me in America. It would render me too unhappy'. It would be wrong to suppose that

Louis Napoleon was being disingenuous and that he wished to spare Hortense the trouble of arriving at a distant destination he hoped to have already left. He was depressed over the failure of a venture that ought to have succeeded, pained over the continued suffering and unknown fate of those who had failed with him, and angered by Louis Philippe's refusal to try him in a public civil court. For a while he genuinely toyed with the idea of surrendering his imperial pretensions and settling in America like other Bonapartes before him.

But such temporary thoughts were temporary indeed. Louis Napoleon landed at Norfolk, Virginia, on 30 March 1837 after a deliberately extended journey calculated to wear down and even possibly sicken and kill him. Shortly afterwards, Charles Thélin and the Comte d'Arese joined him in exile. Uncle Joseph was also on his way back to America, and Louis Napoleon wrote to him; but he did not even reply.

On 2 April, Louis Napoleon left Virginia for New York City, lodging at the Washington Hotel on Broadway. From there he travelled widely or made a base for himself while meeting various American notabilities, some of whom would remain his friends and make themselves useful in later life. He was naturally attracted to the still embryonic country, and even contemplated a grand tour, which may have resulted in an analytical work at the same time as *De la Démocratie en Amérique* by Alexis de Tocqueville. But, in late April, he received a letter from Hortense telling him that she was about to undergo a serious operation. Misled as to the gravity of her condition, she followed this with another communication full of hope; but on the envelope her personal physician, Henri Conneau, had scrawled the words 'Venez! Venez!' in such a way that Louis Napoleon would understand the extreme seriousness of the situation.

Accordingly, on the very next opportunity, 12 June, Louis Napoleon left New York aboard the packet-ship *George Washington*, which docked at Liverpool on 9 July. As was customary for ships destined for London arriving from the New World, it remained there overnight without disembarkation. The following day, a Monday, the ship made its way to London where the faithful Persigny met him at the docks and both men immediately moved into Fenton's Hotel. Tuesday was spent trying to obtain a passport to Arenenberg through either Belgium or France, the shortest routes, and he also met his cousin Lady Stuart, whose feminine companionship he now found of the greatest importance in his emotional predicament. She promised to use her influence and enormous personality to intercede on his behalf with Prince Eszterházy, still the Austrian ambassador in London, and did so to the extent that Eszterházy petitioned the French ambassador, since 1835 Horace Sébastiani, to provide him with an accredited passport. But Sébastiani refused.

Another, less welcome, relative was also in London. Christine's half-brother, Pierre Bonaparte, was Lucien's third son by his second marriage to a widow, Alexandrine Jauberthou. Pierre was a political and social malcontent who had travelled to America after being released from a papal prison in 1836, and while there had followed Louis Napoleon around causing him considerable embarrassment with his violent, drunken behaviour. In 1837 he was in London escaping an indictment in America for having stabbed a dog, staying in Jaunay's Hotel, Leicester Square. This was the *quartier étranger* of London where there were three other foreign hotels – the Cavour, Brunet's, and the Sablonière et Provence – and where sellers of frogs and snails found life particularly lucrative. It was also where low-class prostitutes from France and Belgium, some as young as thirteen, and performers of *Punchinello* also made a good living. Pierre lived there in virtual poverty, and although Louis Napoleon was himself hardly in a position to do so, he helped him out with a substantial loan. Christine

maintained some affection for her half-sibling, but her husband could not bear him and sensibly insisted on leaving London while she entertained Pierre to dinner.

Although there was nothing Louis Napoleon could do to speed up his departure, he naturally did not feel inclined to pass the time at grand social occasions. Instead, numerous people visited him at Fenton's. Among these was Hippolyte Bouffet de Montauban, a colonel who had been aide-de-camp to Eugène de Beauharnais and who had fought at Borodino and Waterloo. Bouffet de Montauban informed Christine that Louis Napoleon had been invited to join Giuseppe Mazzini's semi-secret revolutionary movement *Giovine Italia* in a prominent position. This proved to be a misunderstanding, but again Louis Napoleon – who, being ignorant of the source, had to react as though the invitation had been genuine – declined official involvement in any revolutionary organization. He would become the greatest friend the emerging nation would ever have beyond its shores, but he decided that there were better ways Italy might be served than from within and a position of subservience.

The French Government now regarded Louis Napoleon as a recidivist, and, on 19 July, the Comte de Molé, president of the council, instructed Sébastiani to keep a close eye on him and also to petition the British Government for the assistance of the Metropolitan Police. Home Secretary Lord John Russell was unsympathetic. Both Molé and Sébastiani had confused the benign role of London's police force with the more widespread brief of the *Sûreté*, and Louis Napoleon found it a simple matter to shake off the token eye Lord John Russell assigned to watch him.

On Saturday 29 July, he left Fenton's Hotel, very ostentatiously and with deliberate tarrying, in a newly bought carriage filled with luggage. He drove out to Richmond where he lodged at an inn, making sure that this move was recorded: 'Prince Louis Napoleon Bonaparte ... intends to take up his residence in the neighbourhood of Richmond, in one of the beautiful villas on the banks of the Thames, until he may be able to obtain a passport'.¹⁷ But he did nothing of the kind, and by the time this report was printed in the earliest next edition of a Sunday paper Louis Napoleon had already left England. He had left Richmond early in the morning of the day after his arrival, returning quietly to London in a post-chaise and entering the city in an omnibus. Somehow he had obtained a passport made out to an American businessman named Robinson, which the Swiss minister in London readily signed. Partly disguised, he made his way to the docks and left aboard the packet-steamer *Batavier* to Rotterdam, reaching Arenenberg on 4 August where, on 5 October, Hortense died from gastrointestinal cancer.

Louis Napoleon's third visit had also ended with the English barely noticing him. Granville sent Palmerston a copy of *Le Moniteur universel* as 'An account of an attempt made by Louis Napoleon Buonaparte, son of the Duchess of St Leu, assisted by Col. Vaudrey commanding the Corps of Artillery in Strasburgh, to seduce the troops of that place from their allegiance to Louis Philippe, and to overthrow the existing Govt.'¹⁸ He might just as well have been sending the foreign secretary a racing result. Metternich certainly did not see Louis Napoleon in such a benign way, and he warned the French Government that its misguided habit of exalting everything to do with Napoleon would result in establishing the belief in the future of a Napoleonic dynasty. Louis Philippe thought he had dealt with Louis Napoleon, and that the attempted *coup* had been a failure. Instead, he had witnessed the public birth of an Imperial Pretender.

NOTES and REFERENCES to Chapter Four

¹ *Thirria* i 29.

² *Simpson: Rise* 337, Louis Napoleon to Vieillard 18 Feb. 1834.

³ *Kriegel* 245, Lucien to Henry Vassall Fox 5 Sep. 1834.

⁴ PRO FO. 27/526 (336), Granville to Palmerston 4 Nov. 1836.

⁵ BL Ms Add. 30, 116 f.53.

⁶ *Jerrold* i 246, Louis Napoleon to Vieillard 29 Apr. 1835.

⁷ *Simpson: Rise* 338.

⁸ *Ibid.* loc.cit.

⁹ PRO FO 27/526 (344), Granville to Palmerston 7 Nov. 1836.

¹⁰ PRO FO 27/526 (336), Granville to Palmerston 4 Nov. 1836.

¹¹ *Le Moniteur universel* Thursday 3 Nov. 1836.

¹² PRO FO 27/526 (336), Granville to Palmerston 4 Nov. 1836.

¹³ *Allison* 246.

¹⁴ PRO FO 27/526 (350), 11 Nov. 1836.

¹⁵ *Simpson: Rise* 339, Louis Napoleon to Vieillard 19 Nov. 1836.

¹⁶ *The Times* Tuesday 29 Nov. 1836.

¹⁷ *The Examiner* 6 Aug. 1837.

¹⁸ PRO FO 27/526 (332), Granville to Palmerston 1 Nov. 1836.