

**The tender mercies of Bonaparte in Egypt! : Britons beware / Robert Wilson, K.M.T., Lieutenant Colonel.**

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# The tender Mercies of Bonaparte in Egypt! BRITONS, BEWARE.

SIR ROBERT WILSON, in his "History of the British Expedition to Egypt," gives the following narrative of the cruelties committed by order of GENERAL BONAPARTE, now First Consul of France.

"The Turks justified themselves for the massacre of the French by the massacre at Jaffa. As this act, and the poisoning of the sick, have never been credited, because of such enormities being so incredibly atrocious, a digression to authenticate them may not be deemed intrusively tedious; and, had not the influence of power interfered, the act of accusation would have been preferred in a more solemn manner, and the damning proofs produced by penitent agents of these murders; but neither menaces, recompence, nor promises, can altogether stifle the cries of outraged humanity, and the day for retribution of justice is only delayed. Bonaparte having carried the town of Jaffa by assault, many of the garrison were put to the sword, but the greater part flying into the mosque, and imploring mercy from their pursuers, were granted their lives; and let it be well remembered, that an exasperated army in the moment of revenge, when the laws of war justified the rage, yet heard the voice of pity, received its impression, and proudly refused to be any longer the executioners of an unrelenting enemy. Soldiers of the Italian army, this is a laurel wreath worthy of your fame, a trophy of which the subsequent treason of an individual shall not deprive you! Bonaparte, who had expected much repentment at the compassion manifested by his troops, and determined to relieve himself from the maintenance and care of 3800 prisoners\*, ordered them to be marched to a rising ground near Jaffa, where a division of French infantry formed against them. When the Turks had entered into their fatal alignment, and the manifold preparations were completed, the signal gun fired. Volleys of musketry and grape instantly played against them; and Bonaparte, who had been regarding the scene through a telescope, when he saw the smoke ascending, could not restrain his joy, but broke out into exclamations of approval. Indeed, he had just reason to dread the refusal of his troops thus to dishonour themselves. Kleber had remonstrated in the most strenuous manner; and the officer of the état-major who commanded (for the general to whom the division belonged was absent,) even refused to execute the order without a written instruction; but Bonaparte was too cautious, and sent Berthier to enforce obedience. When the Turks had all fallen, the French troops humanely endeavoured to put a period to the sufferings of the wounded; but some time elapsed before the bayonet could finish what the fire had not destroyed, and probably many languished days in agony. Several French officers, by whom partly these details are furnished, declared this was a scene, the retrospect of which tormented their recollection; and that they could not reflect on it without horror, accustomed as they had been to fights of cruelty. There were the prisoners whom Affait, in his very able work on the plague, alludes to, when he says, that for three days the Turks showed no symptoms of that disease, and it was their putrifying remains which produced the pestilential miasma, which he describes as afterwards making such ravages in the French army. Their bones still lie in heaps, and are thrown to every traveller who arrives; nor can they be confounded with those who perished in the assault, since this field of butchery lies a mile from the town. Such a fact should not, however, be alleged without some proof of leading circumstance, stronger than assertion, being produced to support it; but there would be a want of generosity in naming individuals, and branding them to the latest posterity, for obeying a command, when their submission became an act of necessity, since the whole army did not mutiny against the execution; therefore, to establish farther the authenticity of the relation, this can only be mentioned, that it was Bonaparte's division which fired; and thus every one is afforded the opportunity of falsifying themselves respecting the truth, by enquiring of officers serving in the different brigades composing this division.

"The next circumstance is of a nature which requires, indeed, the most particular details to establish. Since the idea can scarce be entertained, that the commander of an army should order his own countrymen (or, if not immediately such, those amongst whom he had been naturalized) to be deprived of existence when in a state which required the kindest consideration. But the annals of France record the frightful crimes of a Robespierre, a Carrier, and historical truth must now recede one equal to any which has blackened its page. Bonaparte, finding that his hospitals at Jaffa were crowded with sick, sent for a physician, whose name should be inscribed in letters of gold, but which, from weighty reasons, cannot be here inferred: on his arrival, he entered into a long conversation with him respecting the danger of contagion, concluding at last with the remark, that something must be done to remedy the evil, and that the destruction of the sick in the hospital was the only measure which could be adopted. The physician, alarmed at the proposal, bold in the confidence of virtue and the cause of humanity, remonstrated vehemently, representing the cruelty as well as the atrocity of such a murder; but, finding that Bonaparte persevered and menaced, he indignantly left the tent with this memorable observation: 'Neither my principles, nor the character of my profession, will allow me to become a human butcher; and, General, if such qualities are necessary to form a great man, I thank my God that I do not possess them.' Bonaparte was not to be diverted from his object by moral considerations. He persevered, and found an apothecary, who, dreading the weight of power, (but who has since made an atonement to his mind by unequivocally confessing the fact), consented to become his agent, and to administer poison to the sick. Opium at night was administered in grating food; the wretched, unsuspecting victims banqueted; and in a few hours 380 soldiers, who had suffered so much for their country, perished thus miserably by the order of his idol. Is there a Frenchman whose blood does not chill with horror at the recital of such a fact? Surely, the mans of these murdered, unoffending people must be now hovering round the fear of government and . . . . If a doubt should still exist as to the veracity of this statement, let the members of the Institute at Cairo be asked what passed in their fitting after the return of Bonaparte from Syria; they will relate that the same virtuous physician, who refused to become the destroyer of those committed to his protection, accused Bonaparte of high treason, in the full assembly, against the honour of France, her children, and humanity; that he entered into the full details of the poisoning of the sick, and the massacre of the garrison; aggravating these crimes by charging Bonaparte with fringing previously at Rosetta, a number of French and Copts, who were ill of the plague; thus proving, that this disposal of his sick was a premeditated plan, which he wished to introduce into general practice. In vain Bonaparte attempted to justify himself. The members sat petrified with terror, and almost doubted whether the scene passing before their eyes was not illusion. Alas! all these proceedings will not be found in the minutes of the Institute!—No! Bonaparte's policy forebode the danger, and power produced the crime; but let no man, calculating on the force of circumstances which may prevent such an avowal as is solicited, presume on this to deny the whole; there are records which remain, and which in due season will be produced. In the interim, this representation will be sufficient to stimulate enquiry; and, Frenchmen, your honour is indeed interested in the examination."

GENERAL ANDREOSI, in the late Official Correspondence, terms the above "a most atrocious and disgusting calumny." In consequence, Sir Robert has since written the following Letter to the Editors of the Public Newspapers, which we consider as conclusive on the subject.

"Bonaparte had in person inspected, previously, the whole body, amounting to near 5000 men, with the object of faving those who belonged to the towns he was preparing to attack. The age and noble physiognomy of a veteran Janissary attracted his observation, and he asked him sharply, 'Old man, what did you do here?' The Janissary, undaunted, replied, 'I must answer that question by asking you the same: your answer will be, that you came to serve your Sultan; so did I mine.' The intrepid frankness of the reply excited universal interest in his favour. Bonaparte even smiled. 'He is faved,' whispered some of the aids-du-camp. 'You know not Bonaparte,' observed one who had served under him in Italy; 'that smile, I speak from experience, does not proceed from the sentiment of benevolence; remember what I say: The opinion was too true: the Janissary was left in the ranks, doomed to death, and suffered.'

TO THE EDITOR, &c.

SIR,

"In the official correspondence lately published, there appear some remarks, which the French Ambassador was instructed to make on my History of the Expedition to Egypt, and of which I feel called upon to take notice; not in personal controversy with General Andreossi, for, conscious of the superior virtue of my cause, I find myself neither aggrieved nor irritated by the language he has used; but that the public may not attribute my silence to a desire of evading further discussion, and thus the shallow mode of contradiction adopted by the Chief Consul acquire an unmerited consideration.

"The Ambassador observes, 'That a Colonel in the English army has published a work in England, filled with the most atrocious and disgusting calumnies against the French army and its General. The lies it contains have been contradicted by the reception which Colonel Sebastiani experienced. The publicity of his report was at once a refutation and reparation, which the French army had a right to expect.'

"But surely a new signification must have been attached in France to the word calumny, when such a term is applied to my account of the conduct of the French troops in Egypt, and the consequent disposition of the inhabitants towards them!

"Independent, however, of the proofs to be adduced in corroboration of my statement, Europe may justly appreciate the probable truth of what I have written, when she recollects the unparalleled sufferings endured by the unoffending countries into which, during the last war, a French army penetrated; and the will at least hesitate to believe that the same armies should voluntarily ameliorate their conduct in a country more remote, where the atrocities they might commit would be less liable to publicity, and that this extraordinary change should be in favour of a people, whose principles and resistance might have excited the repentment of more generous invaders.

"I will not enter into an unnecessary detail of the numerous facts which I could urge; but I appeal to the honour of every British officer employed in Egypt, whether those observations are not sacredly true, which describe the French as being hateful to the inhabitants of that country, which represent them as having merited that hatred from the ruin and desolation with which their progress through it has been marked; and I am ready, if there be one who refuses to sanction this relation, to resign for ever every pretension to honourable reputation, and submit, without farther struggle, to that odium which should attach to calumny, and a wiful perversion of truth.

"But, Sir, I feel confident there is no individual, who will not amply confirm all that I have written on this subject; and perhaps Europe has a right to condemn me for not having made the accusations still stronger, when I can produce general orders of the French army, for the destruction of villages and their inhabitants; when I can prove, that above 20,000 of the natives perished by the hands of the French soldiery; and that every act of violence was committed, and particularly in Upper Egypt, which could outrage humanity, and disgrace the character of civilized nations. When writing a history of the campaign, was it possible not to express indignation against the authors of such calamities? Would it have been natural not to have felt the animation of that virtuous people, which a reflection on the different conduct of the British soldiery must inspire in the breast of every Briton? I have asserted that a British soldier could traverse alone through any part of Egypt, or even penetrate into the Desert, secure from injury or insult. I have defended the natives as considering the British their benefactors and protectors, soliciting opportunities to manifest their gratitude, and esteeming their uniforms as sacred as the turban of Mahometanism; and I venture to predict, that hereafter the French traveller will be compelled to conceal the name of his nation, and owe his security to the assumption of the British character.

"But, Sir, does the effect of Colonel Sebastiani's report justify the Chief Consul's conclusion, that it is 'a complete refutation of what I have advanced,' even if we attach to that report implicit belief in its candour and veracity? Is it possible that the Chief Consul can suppose the world will trace respect for the French name in the circumstance which occurred to Colonel Sebastiani at Cairo, and which rendered it necessary for him to demand protection from the Vizir? or would he imagine that the apologetic of d'Arzaz Pacha was not intelligible even previous to the instructions being published which M. Talleyrand sent to the French commercial agents?

"That illustrious senator, to whose virtues and stupendous talents England owes so much of her prosperity, has declared, that this report of Colonel Sebastiani in no case contradicts my statement; and I should consider that high opinion as amply sufficient to remove any impression which the French Ambassador's note might otherwise have made, did I not think it a duty to press some observations on that part of the paragraph which alludes to the direct accusation against General Bonaparte, that the public may know I was fully aware of the important responsibility which I had voluntarily undertaken, and in which much national honour was involved. I would with the world seriously to examine, whether the accuser or accused have thrunk from the investigation, and then hold him as guilty who has withdrawn from the tribunal of enquiry.

"I avowed that I was his public accuser; I stood prepared to support the charges. The courts of my country were open to that mode of trial, which, as an innocent man, he could alone have required, but of which he did not dare to avail himself. It was no anonymous libeller against whom he was to have filed his answer, but against one (and without any indecent vanity I may say it) whose rank and character would have justified his most serious attention.

"The charges were too awful to be treated with neglect, and we know that they have not been read with indifference. Nor is it possible that the First Consul can imagine the fame of General Bonaparte is less sullied, because a few snuff-boxes bearing his portrait were received by some abject or avaricious individuals with expressions of esteem. Or can he hope, that the contemptible, but not less unworthy insinuation, directed against the gallant and estimable British General, will divert mankind from a reflection on the crimes with which he stands arraigned?

"Fortunately for Europe, she is daily becoming more intimately acquainted with the character of this heretofore misconceived man; and I confess that I feel considerable gratification when I indulge the thought that I have contributed to its development.

"Success may, for inscrutable purposes, continue to attend him; abject senators may decree him a throne, or the Pantheon; but history shall render injured humanity justice, and an indignant posterity inscribe on his cenotaph—

"Ille venena Colebia  
Et quicquid ulquam concipitur nefas,  
Tractavit.

I am, Sir, yours,  
ROBERT WILSON, K. M. T.  
Lieutenant-Colonel."