

The Prince Imperial; a psychological perspective.

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I have written this article based upon experience gained in two careers, as an historian and a consultant clinical psychologist.

Much is known about Louis Napoleon, the Prince Imperial, and most details of the circumstances of his death in 1879 are now reasonably beyond dispute. He died in South Africa at the hands of the Zulus while attached to the British invasion force under Lord Chelmsford. But some questions remain. What was the Prince really like as a person and how damaging or advantageous was his childhood? How normal was he, was day-to-day reality within or beyond his grasp and understanding? Did he die because he saw service in the British Army as a means of earning glory – knowing that if he died a ‘glorious’ death, he might vindicate himself in the eyes of his fellow Frenchmen as well as redeeming his family’s shaky reputation? During this article, I will briefly examine some little known aspects of his upbringing that might assist the reader to answer these questions.

As with any psychological investigation, it is best to start at the beginning and I will commence by taking a brief look at Louis’ pedigree. His grandmother had been born a Kirkpatrick – of that ancient Scottish family, the Kirkpatricks of Closeburn. In her early twenties she lived with her father in Spain; he had been reduced to running something the ill-natured might have described as a wine bar. The colourful Miss Kirkpatrick gained part of her education for life ‘working as a hostess learning the ways of men’ in the club ‘for officers and foreign visitors’ run behind her father’s wine shop.⁽¹⁾ In 1817 Miss Kirkpatrick married the insignificant one-eyed and lame Don Cipriano, Comte de Teba, later to become the Comte de Montijo. In time, the new Countess bore two daughters, firstly Paca, then Eugénie. It was generally noted that, curiously, the two girls were totally different in appearance, character and behaviour.

Fact is often stranger than fiction, and in this case the facts are even stranger than most commonly accepted accounts of this marriage. Their marriage was one of complete opposites, the Count was poor – the new Countess was a spendthrift, he was a traditionalist – she was a devious dreamer; due to her outrageous affairs they soon drifted apart and in their later years never saw each other. The plot thickens, the Countess twice became pregnant and bore two daughters; the question of the babies’ father requires some consideration. The first daughter, Paca (christened Maria Francisca de Sales) was conceived and born while the hapless Count was incarcerated in the grim Santiago prison where the ‘liberales’ were detained; it is unlikely that the Countess managed a conjugal visit to her husband so the identity of the child’s father must be in doubt. When the second daughter, (christened Eugenia yet subsequently known as Eugénie) was conceived, society talk throughout the Second Empire suggested that her father was George Villiers, later to become the fourth Earl of Clarendon and British Foreign Secretary. Certainly, the Countess De Montijo was living with friends in Paris while the Count languished in prison and records reveal that Villiers was living nearby at the same time. Villiers was known by top socialites to be a special friend of the Countess: it was a situation described by Villiers’ sister as ‘very wicked’.

If the father was George Villiers, then the baby Eugénie would have been totally British; this would logically indicate that her son the Prince Imperial, fathered by Napoleon III, was half French – the other half being British. This hypothesis would, I suspect, rather upset the French – even today. ⁽²⁾

During the years following her marriage, the new Countess de Montijo liked to travel. A great part of her life was spent in flitting, with her two daughters, from capital to capital, and from social spa to spa. She was a devious and gregarious woman, stirring, vainglorious, and an incurable romantic. She was obviously proud of her two charming daughters, whom she constantly embarrassed by praising them in public, and by her frank eagerness to marry them off to anyone with a title the moment they came of age.

She had succeeded brilliantly with Paca, the elder and best beloved daughter, who had by then become the Duchess of Alba. Eugénie had been sixteen when her sister was married, and there was much gossip about her part in the affair. She had been in love with the Duke herself; she had fully expected him to propose to her. When he made an offer to her sister, Eugénie had taken poison and almost died. According to relatives, the Duke had proposed to her, but knowing Paca’s heart, she had adjured him to transfer his affections. That something happened between the three, we can be sure from an incoherent and frantic letter that Eugénie wrote to the Duke at the time. Eugénie survived the experience and developed into a wild social beauty; she began spending time on the periphery of the French Court where her charms were much appreciated by the gentlemen.

Within a short space of time, Eugénie, a true beauty of twenty-six, was tolerably well known in French society. Perhaps she was too well known; the correct opinioned that a young unmarried woman had no business to have done such a lot of travelling, and also that the daughter of ‘such a mother’ should be avoided by men of sense.

Eugénie made a point of appearing everywhere in a cloud of admirers, but it did not follow that they were after her *pour le bon motif*. She was certainly eccentric; she flirted openly; she had a reputation for having dashed through the streets of Madrid on unsaddled horses; she patronised bullfighters; she went about with a dagger stuck in her belt. And then, she had that mother! – enough to frighten off any *soupirant*.

Eugénie was rarely seen alone, there were numerous ‘associations’ and she had been engaged to a young Spanish grandee, but had thought better of it on learning of his on-going affair with another woman. Juicy gossip was commonplace so it was hardly surprising that when Napoleon III became infatuated with Eugénie, the liaison should have been looked on, not as a romance, but as a great joke. Eugénie might well have seen the finger of Destiny pointing to her; French society saw only a clever and experienced mother and daughter pair, out to hook a very big fish indeed.

Just how did this scheming pair manage to ensnare Napoleon III? He was unmarried and getting restless. He was forty-five and wanted to leave an heir; if he left it much longer, he knew he might be too late. He had already kept an English mistress, Miss Howard, and although described by many as ‘having the appearance of an opium eater’, he nevertheless possessed charm for women and the number of his love affairs was notorious. Napoleon failed to woo any available European lady of royal birth and made one final attempt; to engage Her Serene Royal Highness Princess Adelaide of Hohenlohe, aged 17, daughter of Queen Victoria’s half sister, Princess Feodora of Hohenlohe–Langenburg. The proposal had to go via Queen Victoria – who was not amused, and the proposal failed then and there.

A great deal happened on the 18th January 1853, Napoleon was rejected by Princess Adelaide; that same evening he proposed to Mlle. Eugénie de Montijo, ignoring all advice about her relatives, the Kirkpatricks of Closeburn. Mlle. De Montijo was an undeniably lovely looking woman, possibly of blue blood, albeit rather transparent blue blood. At length and quite suddenly, “the Imperial Pamela obtained her reward.” So the London *Times* put it, with cheerful candour, when it announced the betrothal. Lord Cowley, the British Ambassador, reported that the announcement was made to ‘universal disappointment’ adding that ‘had Princess Adelaide accepted him, the Montijo would have been sent to the right about’.

But the effect, if not manqué, could still less be described as flattering. “We learn with some amusement,” the *Times* went on with provoking British superiority, “that this romantic event in the annals of the French Empire has called forth the strongest opposition, and provoked the utmost irritation. The Imperial family, the Council of Ministers, and even the lower coteries of the palace or its purlieus, all affect to regard this marriage as an amazing humiliation, and they deplore the failure of the Royal marriage before on the tapis, as if they were not satisfied with the dignity and grandeur of their own Emperor, until he had cohabited with an Archduchess.”

That was all very well according to the British press; but at the root of it was the assumption that it could make no difference to Britain whom the Emperor took to wife, as he was no one in any case. In France people were naturally less inclined to this view.

The Bonapartists, almost to a man, tore their hair; the royalists, especially the Orleanists, stamped on their hats in rage; and the women of doubtful reputation, we are told, “nearly died of envy.” Anything, thought Napoleon’s ministers – and indeed the nation at large – would have been better than this. If the Emperor couldn’t get a princess, he could at least have chosen a Frenchwoman! But Mlle. De Montijo! Well, chuckled the salons, “Hortense’s son” had done for himself this time and no mistake. No lady of birth would ever dream of attending the receptions of such an Empress; and as for the Royal houses of Europe – they might have recognised the Emperor, but they would take good care, after this, not to meet him socially.

Napoleon defended his position by stating that Royal alliances were a delusion and a snare. For seventy years only one consort of a French ruler had brought good luck in her train and so he boldly proclaimed “The union I am about to contract is not in accord with the traditions of ancient policy: therein lies its advantage.”

Her wedding and début, if creditable on her part, were not at all well received by society – or the public who hooted her. Inside the cathedral, dead silence met the couple; not one spontaneous acclamation, such as had burst out a year ago, after that *coup d’état*. Outside, a sort of unmoved curiosity prevailed. The crowd was thick enough; it stared, commented, exchanged ribaldries, but there was no excitement, still less enthusiasm. In the evening, a few public buildings were illuminated, and that was all.

Eugénie spent part of her honeymoon in the footsteps of Marie-Antoinette. In that ill-fated and most unpopular Queen, she saw her own likeness. With this idea, she began to collect relics of her unhappy predecessor, and deliberately to cultivate the resemblance. It was hardly tactful but Eugénie could not help seeing herself as a tragic figure.

Those who felt amiable towards the Empress were few indeed. The Bonapartes disliked her, the salons disliked her, the nation disliked her; everyone was burning to catch her out, and everything she did was liable to be seized on and distorted as proof of iniquity. Yet, for whatever reason, she meant so well. She meant the people to bless her; she slumped and gave alms, entering with conviction on the duties of Lady Bountiful. Perhaps these charitable excursions would have done her more good if she had not gone about them disguised

as an old lady in spectacles. But even her good works were “Montijo”: she was “Montijo” in all she did or left undone. Florence Nightingale described her as “the Empress born to be a dressmaker”. So said the critics.

Yet these childless years had brought at least one enduring triumph for her and the Emperor. No less a triumph than the conquest of Queen Victoria. Nothing had seemed less likely to happen. To Queen Victoria, Louis Napoleon was at first only a rogue who had ousted poor old Louis Philippe, and behaved scandalously to all the ‘Orleans’, her friends and connections. Prince Albert, too, was violently anti-Empire. He had been furious with his brother, the Duke of Saxe-Coburg, for deciding to ignore the social ban on Napoleon, and go and visit him. Yet only six months later he went himself; and very shortly after that, Napoleon III and his Empress – think of it, said the *Times*, his Empress “Mlle. De Montijo”! - were guests at Windsor. The Queen resigned herself to the visit, but she did not like it at all. True, Prince Albert had looked the man over, and had not found him impossible, but she could not like it. And her ministers advised her to bestow the Garter on him!

However, the first impression was favourable. The Emperor was “so very quiet; his voice is low and soft, and - il ne fait pas de phrases!” The day after, he was “very quiet and amiable, and easy to get on with...so full of tact.” The third day, his manners were “particularly good, easy, quiet and dignified, as if he had been born a King’s son, and brought up for the place.” And by the end of his visit – “that he is a very extraordinary man, with great qualities, there can be no doubt – I might almost say a mysterious man... He is endowed with wonderful self-control, great calmness, even gentleness, and with a power of fascination, the effect of which upon those who become more intimately acquainted with him is most sensibly felt.” The triumph was chiefly his; he had flirted with Queen Victoria to the embarrassment of her staff and Eugénie had done her part very nicely. Unlike her husband, she was not so foolish as to try any unseemly deportment on Queen Victoria. Indeed she never tried it on state occasions. For those occasions, she had her own manner, a very simple, diffident, almost pleading manner, which sometimes offended French *amour-propre*, but which had great charm. She asked to be taken to the nursery, admired and petted the children, bewailed her own disappointment, and was grateful for the Queen’s matronly advice to avoid hot baths. The Queen thought her “very pretty, and very uncommon-looking,” and they got on better and better. Indeed the adieux were most touching. The royal children began to cry; this set off the Empress, whose large beautiful eyes had the gift of tears; “through the bright quire th’ infectious virtue ran”; and finally they were all sobbing together, even the suite. It was a great day.

The year ended, and the Crimean War ended: it was now 1856: the Peace Conference had met, and Napoleon III had reached the very summit of his triumph and popularity. The country adored him. Even the Parisians were enthusiastic about him; they had not favoured the war, but still it was a fine thing to have avenged 1812. All he wanted now was an heir. And conveniently there was news that the heir would be forthcoming, possibly some time in March. There was a report that, if a boy, he would be King of Algiers.

It was hoped that Eugénie would not give birth till March 20th, the date of birth of the Roi de Rome; and, to assist the coincidence, she was heavily dosed with morphine. This increased her danger, without achieving the attended result. On the evening of the 14th, her pains began.

All those appointed to be present – ministers, officials, relatives – were hastily summoned. The Countess was there, and the Duke of Alba, and Princess Mathilde and, of course the brother of Napoleon III, ‘Plonplon’: making, unless fortune favoured him, a last appearance as heir presumptive. But Plonplon’s luck was out, the child was a boy.

The glad news was telegraphed immediately to the Pope and then to the princes of Europe. It was boomed out by the cannon along the Invalides, a full royal salute of a hundred and one guns. Unluckily this thrilling occasion was wasted, for Paris slept.

At two days old, the baby boy received the Grand Cross of the Legion of Honour. Bounties, decorations and amnesties were showered abroad in his name. And as he lay in his cradle, all the world came to pay homage, his future subjects, the ambassadors to his father’s Court, the statesmen of the Peace Congress and, finally, the evil genius, the wicked fairy at the christening, the second plenipotentiary of the second Teutonic state, Count Otto von Bismarck.

The tone of the English Press had the advantage of contrast. “The same fortune,” remarked the *Times* with judicial coolness, “which has raised Louis Napoleon from an exile to a Sovereign has now presented him with an heir, on whom may devolve his vast acquisitions, and who will at any rate have as good a claim as any other Frenchman to the throne of the first nation of the continent.” It went on to dwell on proverbial accidents between the cup and the lip and to point out that the crown of France had not passed direct from father to son for more than two centuries. It mentioned the Roi de Rome, the Comte de Chambord, the Comte de Paris, and observed in conclusion: “The Napoleon born last Sunday morning may be crowned the fourth in his line: or may add one more to the Pretenders of France.”

“The Prince Imperial,” wrote Mérimée to his old friend, a year later, “is a remarkably handsome baby, very like his mother at the same age. He has her serious, melancholy air; as though he observed a great deal, and already saw the world as it is – therefore, not en beau. To be sure his angle of observation reveals the worst of it.”

The Imperial child, however, was really suffering not from disillusionment, but from that malady of Princes – ennui. The young Dr. Barthez, attached to his service personnel, had observed symptoms of it just after the christening. He had found an ideal baby, fat, healthy, good tempered, never crying or screaming, but so strangely placid, so detached from all that went on, that the irresistible inference was bad hearing. The Prince was even subjected to tests to see if he were deaf. But he was not deaf: and a little further study produced the correct diagnosis – he was just bored. Dr. Barthez perceptively wrote,

There is never any familiarity in his presence; all those he sees are in full dress, all are quiet in their manner, and notice no one but himself. He is the starting-point and the goal; the prime centre of a calm, regular, monotonous movement. He lives in spacious apartment, and is carried, for his airings, under lofty trees, or along a wide terrace with a distant view. He knows nothing of the laughter, the jumping, the changes of expression, the tears and rages, which vary life when a number of children are together; all matters that the very youngest babies regard with such interest and curiosity, and through which they become animated and develop, form their ideas and begin to learn far sooner than is thought. That, to my mind, is why at four months old the Prince Imperial is already so cold, so quiet, and so impassive. Is it an advantage or otherwise? Perhaps I should say yes: for it is the beginning of the education a Prince must receive.

To increase the training in boredom, one of the Emperor's doctors had advised that the Prince should not be encouraged to play too much "on account of the very precocious development of his intellect.

Eugénie did not like babies much, and at this stage, she gave the impression of an anxious rather than a fond parent, showing less interest in her husband 'Loulou' than in the Prince Imperial. She was all for experiments; her son was scarcely born when she began asking if it was time to put him into short clothes, yet she too had her panics, quite as absurd as the Emperor's. She had an idea that he was backward, that he didn't make progress, that his head was too large, or too hot, or not hot enough. If he made vague passes at an object, instead of seizing it, she feared for his intellect. If he vomited, she jumped to the conclusion he had been poisoned.

At birth, Louis had been enrolled as a grenadier: at eighteen months, he acquired a Lilliputian uniform, and a diminutive busby; and thus habited, correct in every detail, though rather unsteady on the legs, he made his bow to the world. In his third year, he was promoted to epaulettes and began to appear in uniform at official gatherings. At military reviews he would sit perched up before the Emperor, very stiff, saluting with childish gravity and importance.

His formal education began, as was fitting for a young prince, in the riding-school: even before he could walk steadily, he could ride a horse. At six months old, he had been strapped, sideways, on a minute Shetland pony, and of course photographed; in every conceivable situation, he was sure to be photographed. At eighteen months, his training began in earnest: he was handed over to an equerry, Biarritz, who became the most important influence in his childhood.

Several years later Biarritz witnessed an even more drastic trial of the Spartan method: Louis was taken to the seaside and by way of a swimming lesson, plunged head first into the waves, terrified nearly out of his senses, and then reproached as a water-funk. He, a corporal! He could face a loaded cannon without flinching, and yet he was afraid of the water! "Well," whimpered Louis very reasonably, "I'm in command of the cannon, but I'm not in command of the sea." Another time, he came into the drawing room to show a beautiful box of chocolates that had been given him; he was told to go round and offer one to each of the guests. Half-way through, the temptation became too strong, and he popped one in his own mouth. Instantly a motherly hand clutched the back of his neck: he was made to spit out the chocolate, and the box was taken away from him. Everyone felt sorry for the child, and of course the story lost nothing in repetition. Those who disliked Eugénie freely stigmatised her as an unnatural mother.

Eugénie once reproached her son for speaking in company. "His views!" commented Eugénie. "Yes, they must be interesting! My dear Louis, you are an ignorant little boy, and M. Le Verrier is too kind, listening to your chatter. The best astronomy lesson you can have at this hour is that it's time for bed. Off you go." And he was led away, no doubt feeling small. "Oh," returned His Highness out of his mother's hearing, "we'll see! Mamma always says no, but then papa always says yes, and I have my own will as well." Eugénie's severities had not crushed him painfully.

He had one talent: from the moment he got a pencil in his hand, he could draw. In any vacant hour he would sit down and produce one drawing after another, almost all military – French soldiers of every type and period, in camp, in battle, on the march – the variations were endless. Everyone scrambled, of course, for these little masterpieces, innocent of technique, but full of life and movement, attesting a keen eye and an astonishing visual memory.

Once or twice Eugénie endured a public scandal, and nearly a break-up of the marriage. In 1860, Eugénie was thrown terribly off balance by the death of Paca, her only sister, and the person whom she had loved best. While this grief was raw, she happened one evening to visit Napoleon's private suite in the Tuileries, a thing

she never did and there she found him enjoying the company of a pretty girl in a telltale condition of disarray. For an instant they were all dumb and motionless: then “*Sortez, mademoiselle!*” commanded the Empress. The intruder vanished precipitately, and, no doubt, Napoleon would have been only too glad to do the same.

This time, he did not get off with the usual *mauvais quart d’heure*; Eugénie’s frayed nerves and sense of humiliation made her completely intransigent. She would bear it no longer. She would not go with him to Compiègne; she would go to Spain, and take her boy with her. The announcement threw Napoleon into panic. He reasoned unavailingly: he employed go-betweens: he persuaded Mme. De Montijo to use her influence. In the end Eugénie gave up the Spanish project. But no Compiègne. She wanted to be alone: she would go to Scotland and view her ancestral home. And go she did; not, of course, alone, but with a sufficiently reduced escort to indicate her loneliness. She visited Holyrood, Dalkeith and Glasgow, and the Duke of Atholl and the Duchess of Hamilton; she scoured the country in all weathers – it was the middle of November – and repeatedly got soaked through, and fatigued her escort to dropping-point, and, in short, enjoyed herself not a little. On the way back, she inveigled an invitation to see Queen Victoria, who found in her great beauty, but horribly sad over Paca’s death, and thought it very strange that she never mentioned the Emperor.

Meanwhile, Napoleon returned to the charms of his mistress from Saumur, the “dregs of her sex” according to Eugénie. The Emperor had lavished money and jewels on this “shameless creature”; scarcely a day passed but he went to see her, and when that was impossible, Marguerite would slip into the Tuileries in boy’s clothes. Then they had a son: and Eugénie’s anger overflowed into fury. The child would prejudice Louis’s future; she foresaw intrigues, blackmail, and a succession of nameless evils.

But back to the fast growing Prince Imperial and to a number of incidents that might have a bearing on his future frame of mind. One afternoon a maid of honour, going out to walk in the garden, met him hobbling along on his tutor’s arm, deadly pale, and trying with all his might not to cry. “Why, monseigneur, what can be the matter?”

“I fell from the beam in the gymnasium, and” – here the sobs burst forth in spite of him – “I’ve hurt myself so much!” They got him indoors to his nurse as quickly as possible, and had only just accomplished it when he was violently sick. A period of languor and constant headaches followed this accident; he went on complaining of a pain in the hip, and said it hurt him to walk. Finally the surgeon Nélaton was called in. An abscess had formed in the joint; he would have to operate.

Louis once more behaved splendidly. Indeed, he openly welcomed this new ordeal; it was so like being wounded; it gave him the chance to prove that he was a soldier. He begged, of course in vain, to do without chloroform, and insisted that his mother should not be told when the operation was to take place: she would mind so awfully, and he was not a bit afraid himself. On this point he got his way, but there was no possibility of sparing the Emperor, who needed sedation more than Louis. Not that that would have occurred to Louis, for papa was also a soldier; he had thought papa especially would be overjoyed to see him so brave. And nobody would see, if they gave him chloroform!

They did give it, and all went well; though it greatly distressed Louis to think the wound was behind. “A brave man ought to have his wounds in front” he confided to his tutor; he hoped there would be no scar, or some day people might believe he had run away. That was his anxiety. Others were more concerned to know if he would be lame: the surgeons were afraid he might be, reported one, and added: “I do not think that France would accept a halting Emperor.” So much for the cult of the “little Prince,” of whom worse rumours were circulating as he limped about St. Cloud in tedious convalescence. The boy was a ‘degenerate’, he was ‘incurably diseased’, and he was ‘feeble-minded’.

Nevertheless, in some ways the Prince was different and certainly more difficult than a really naughty child might have been. He promised so well, and yet his teachers did not make headway: active resistance they might have coped with, but this charming, respectful boy somehow eluded their grasp. His very willingness, though it was genuine enough, had a slippery quality; he never sulked, he never actually disobeyed...but he didn’t seem to listen. He couldn’t listen, apparently; an order might have been repeated two or three times, before he seemed to hear it at all. And then he was restless – not like other boys, but pathologically, incessantly: neither threats nor coaxing could prevail on him to sit still, or fix his attention for more than five minutes. He might appear to have settled down in good earnest, and the next moment the sound of a bugle in the courtyard, the tramp of the soldiers relieving guard, any least trifle would send him off at a tangent, and his work would be completely forgotten. It drove the governor beyond patience.

For when the Prince’s blood was once up, he might do anything: “he would have gone through a window”, wrote the tutor, “or a closed door, he would have jumped from the top of a house: he lost all idea of the possible, all idea of reality.” He was beyond reason or remonstrance, completely out of himself. Indeed, the pattern of behaviour, which was to be his undoing in Zululand, was forming.

The *Avenue* saw his début as a bicyclist. Those were the splendid days of the penny-farthing – or velocipede, to give it its proper title – when the great rode up and down for sport on their lovely terraces, and there was no question of getting anywhere. It was, however, highly possible to fall off in dramatic style, and that alone turned Louis into a devotee.

He had a passion for danger and those in charge of him scarcely dared to avert their eyes for fear of some escapade. One day, for instance, M. Filon entered his pupil's second floor room unexpectedly, and found it empty, the window open, and the Prince outside, balancing perilously along the ledge. The tutor's heart was in his mouth, and he could do nothing, except shut the door again very quietly, and hope for the best. It was no moment for the sight or sound of authority, for Louis was much more afraid of being scolded than of breaking his neck.

If he had managed to kill himself in one of these experiments, however gratuitously, someone would, of course, have been blamed, and the result was that he always led the life of a child: eyes were for ever upon him, he had less freedom than a child in the nursery. His pastimes were supervised like his work, and yet they were not so very dangerous; for even when the fray was hottest, and the Prince most unmanageable, the other young people could be relied upon to look after him. They were supposed to be his equals for the time, but they never forgot who he was: there was not much chance, indeed, with his teachers anxiously looking on. So Louis knew nothing of the rough and tumble of growing up; he only thought so.

This clockwork life might have been expected to crush all zest out of him, or if not, to stir up active resistance, but it did neither; it only made him almost uncannily irresponsible. Never being obliged to think what he was doing, he gave up the habit, and like a 'Johnny Head-In-Air' walked about in a dream. One tutor complained, "He would have tumbled into a ditch, he would have run his face against a wall if there had been no one there to a catch hold of him."

"Almost in vain," wrote Archibald Forbes, the famous Daily News correspondent, "does one range through the records of the Second Empire in a quest of but a glimmer of naturalness. There is a boy in the story, it is true, and surely, hopes the enquirer, some trait of nature is to be recognised in connection with him. But no; he was a buckram boy from his swaddling clothes, poor little toy and tool of sham Imperialism, down to the 'baptism of fire'. The boyhood of this unfortunate child was as unreal as the fantasy of which it was the victim."

At the age of fifteen he was taken to watch his father suffer ignominious defeat by the Prussians at the battle of Sedan. To avoid capture like his father, he and his guardians had taken a train at the next station to Maubeuge and thus, in a third-class carriage, and in the blouse of a peasant boy, he had crossed the frontier into Belgium. All was safe from that moment.

Louis was the first of the Imperial exiles to land in England. He had been smuggled out of France in disguise. He had now discovered that a man's bitterest foes are of his own house: was it not so with the Emperor, whom the Germans had respected, while his own subjects were vilifying him as a traitor and common thief?

From the first days in England he was restless and unable to settle down. The mere fact of exile would have been enough and he took it harder than any of the other exiles. For the lad of fifteen was still the child who had clung so obstinately to a scrap of velvet belonging to his old nurse; who had saved the little chairs from his nursery, and who valued Louis Conneau, his friend from boyhood, above any possible friend. The things he had known longest became a part of him; he could not chop and change, and so he could not be otherwise than wretched in a foreign country.

One day, when Louis and his companions were waiting as usual for the train to London, who should walk on to the platform but Mr. Gladstone. He had staved off his visit to the Imperial family till the last possible moment, he would a good deal rather have seen them established in the Far West; but here he was, and as the Prince was there too there was nothing for it but to go up and speak to him.

They talked of Louis's studies, and of King's College, which Mr. Gladstone praised highly, and M. Filon was delighted to have such a close-up of the Great Man. M. Filon wrote, "He seemed worried at first; his manner was cold and stiff. But gradually his face relaxed and softened, and on parting he looked down on the Imperial lad with a sort of fatherly interest mingled with pity." The tutor never forgot that look, but was wrong in thinking that it implied a change of attitude. The Heir of France might be very charming, poor boy; he might have any number of qualities, but they did not alter the fact that he was a nuisance.

As time passed, Louis was still intensely unhappy – quite as unhappy in the second year of exile as he had been in the first. He still pined for home, his life had no object, and only a visit from some old playmate could take him out of himself. And then further grief for the youth, his father, Napoleon III died.

"An enormous name has passed out of the living world into history." So said the Times: and, in fact, the death of Napoleon III placed even more pressure on Louis as heir to France. The Emperor's will, drawn up in 1865, bequeathed to Louis "the seal I used to carry on my watch-chain, and which belonged to my mother." That and only that; Louis was even more wretched at this snub. Everything besides went to Eugénie. No other person was mentioned at all. Napoleon III left only £60,000, and the Empress Eugénie, between her estates and the money from her jewels, could have brought him several times over.

The Prince then attended the Military Academy at Woolwich where he ensured that every physical feat was carried to excess; he was immediately noted for his extravagance and white-hot enthusiasm. In a mood of high

spirits, he would become infantile; no child of five could have been more exuberant, irrepressibly enthusiastic, or felt a stronger need to work off its gaiety in action. Even in adulthood, these actions mirrored his childhood.

One afternoon an officer, drilling a band of cadets in the inner court, was startled by a great clatter behind him, and observed a sudden stir among his pupils. Turning, he saw the Prince Imperial on the ground, at the bottom of a flight of stone steps, and, close by, the wreck of a bicycle. Louis had scrambled up in a moment; in answer to enquiries, he pointed to the steep flight of steps, and explained sweetly that he had been trying to ride down it.

“Was not that very rash, Sir?” enquired the officer.

“Well,” returned Louis, “I cleared it yesterday, and meant to do so again – but as you see, Sir, my steed has thrown me, and has broken his back.”

On another occasion, late at night, Louis was travelling in a carriage with his tutor. Suddenly, as they were crossing a rustic bridge over – as far as the tutor could discern – complete blackness, Louis jumped on to the parapet, and thence into space. The tutor’s blood froze with mingled horror and incredulity. He probably had a sense of having gone mad.

The next instant, he was restored by a peal of laughter from – not the rushing torrent into which he imagined Louis to have hurled himself – but a roadway ten or twelve feet below. The Prince scrambled up again; the tutor scolded; the culprit wheedled away his annoyance like a spoilt child.

More seriously, Louis was ever the target for the French left wing. That was to be expected, and a serious attack, however vicious, he could have borne – it might even have flattered him. But all the shafts were poisoned with ridicule. Louis kept an eye on the newspapers – and suffered from them, to a degree he hoped no one would ever guess. He was known pleasantly as *Baby*, *Napoleon III½* or *Velocipede IV*. To the French press he was the *idiot*, the *fruit sec* of his military class. Never had the Royal Military Academy been tormented with such a booby. His examination results were so appalling that he could not be placed – and so on.

In reality Louis struggled with his studies and almost every subject not required for examinations had to give ground. But every gibe went home, as surely as if pointed with truth itself; the victim did not cry out, but there can be no doubt that he suffered inwardly. His reputation was being murdered by inches, and he must keep quiet, pretend to ignore it, as his father had done. He kept quiet, or if a twinge did now and then escape him, it took the form of a smile. That year, he was photographed with the class that, according to the French press, had “left off speaking to him” – standing in a group of young men, and obviously every one of them as a pea in a pod. Louis inscribed the copy he gave to M. Filon: “A fruit sec in Coventry.”

But the rumours were not all malicious. That was the really hard thing – the thing that might well have caused him to despair. Almost the entire outer world insisted on believing that he was dull, in the teeth of evidence. Even in England, you heard again and again that his success at Woolwich was, of course, faked; the examiners knew the writing, or saw a foreign hand, and marked the papers accordingly. Nothing was advanced in support of this; it seemed to rest on nothing, except the “broad, sure ground” that, where intelligence was being judged, royalty’s natural position was at the bottom.

It would have been sheer waste of breath to add that Louis’ marks were rather an understatement of his abilities – that he was a poor examinee. But in truth he was. He approached knowledge at a gallop, taking in the general principles and rushing over the details. The result, in mathematics, was that he often botched a difficult question he understood for lack of a simple formula that he had not bothered with. Also, he got excited, and was more liable than usual to mistake the English, and answer quite off the point.

At the end of term, he left at once for Arenenberg, asking that the results of his examination – the last but one – should be wired. He was eleventh this time. With an extra language, it would have been eighth. In the ensuing weeks he was, as he wrote, “wrapped up in his final examinations, thinking and talking of little else.” Eugénie wrote that it would soon be over – “je suis très nervous, comme disent les Anglais.” Presently, it was over. The results appeared at the end of January; and Louis had passed out seventh.

As an officer cadet, he had singled out no one as a friend but on being invited to join some Royal Artillery manoeuvres, he quickly formed new ties, the very first since crossing the Channel, perhaps the first since childhood. He joined in with everything, enjoyed the activity and hardship but especially the company of junior officers. Even the miserable English weather didn’t dampen his spirits: he wrote to his mother, “Our misfortunes had had no effect on the morale of the troops; they are resigned to the weather now they have a French cook to make up for it. This cook is a charming young man, endowed with the most exquisite graces of mind and body... This cook, as you will have guessed from my account of him, is myself”.

During this camp an event occurred one evening where, once again, his true inner personality got the better of him; he tried to jump over a campfire, fell into it, and severely burnt his arm. Of course he made light of it, and insisted on riding into Guildford with the battery as if nothing had happened; the result was an inflamed arm and several degrees of fever. Still he was determined to ride again the next day, and only the strictest medical veto prevailed on him, not to think better of such foolishness, but to give it up. As usual, he made a

conquest of the doctor, who found it hard to say enough for his courage in bearing pain, or for the tact and sweetness of his manners.

And what was he like – the finished product, the “little Prince” who had now, amid such anxieties and heart searching, assumed the direction of his own fate? In character, almost everyone set him down as a cheerful extrovert; they noted his exuberance, his love of teasing, his joies d’enfant, and concluded that he was essentially light of heart. And the fall of the Empire had given him, so to speak, an excuse. He did not get over it, partly because he did not want to get over it. More – since the Emperor’s death, he had resolved not to.

“When I lost my father,” he wrote to M. Filon shortly after their separation, “I saw clearly what I had to do. From that hour I have had only one object in life, and have marched straightforward without a glance behind. If I set my foot on a precipice, I shall fall with honour, and perhaps at the bottom I shall find again what I have lost in this world. If, without turning from the path, I surmount its obstacles, it will be my satisfaction to have carried on the Emperor’s life work.”

But following the military manoeuvres, it was back home to Camden and Eugénie, an uncongenial and false position to say the least. His mother’s authority had ceased when he came of age; he was director of a great party and autocrat de jure of a great people – but he was not master in his own house. Indeed, it was not his house.

If he had come of age on the French throne, the Empress would have been obliged to give him up; she would have retired to the Élysée, and they could have loved and esteemed each other at a safe distance. Napoleon’s will had settled all that. But in exile no such parting could be thought of. Money was scarce – or Eugénie always expected it to be scarce, which was the same thing; and besides, the Prince had a double duty to his mother in their adversity. He was her only comfort now; he felt that, and would not have appeared to neglect her for the world. So, without discussion, they continued under one roof; and neither filial love nor a strong resemblance of attitude could quite prevent it from being a strain.

Nor did the awkwardness of the position end there. Living under his mother’s roof, the Prince could neither entertain whom he pleased, nor get away when he chose; he was obliged in courtesy to respect her wishes, even when he thought them unreasonable. And beyond the claim of good manners, there was his duty as a son. Eugénie no longer had the right to make him obey, and he was extremely conscious that she had not; but still less was it in his power to throw off the yoke with uncouth abruptness, the moment he was legally rid of it. If his mother objected to an acquaintance or a project, it was hard to insist; if the scheme required outlay, of course it became impossible. It was impossible to show that any woman had the smallest influence on his life.

When the Zulu War first broke out, not even the Prince had thought it worth going to. It was hardly a war; it was a skirmish with the blacks, a punitive expedition. Then came the slaughter at Isandlwana. England’s regiments had been wiped out, had fallen to the last man – and England was dumb with shock and humiliation. The affair grew “serious” overnight. Reinforcements were hurried off – and Louis’ connection with Aldershot became agony. For he was in the thick of it all. His friends glowed with hope and excitement; they all expected to serve, and two of them, Bigge and Slade, were ordered out straight away. And then the third and last arrived to take leave; when Wodehouse had gone, the Prince was very silent and absent.

It was positively his duty as Heir of France to go to this war. What could he do at home, what chance had he to show he was good for anything? People were always throwing the Orleans princes in his teeth – saying the Orleans princes had fought and he hadn’t, and this was the perfect war for him to fight in – at the other end of the world, against savages, involving no European interest. He was not a “*homme de plaisir*”.

He worked on Sir Lintorn Simmons. He worked on the Empress to such a point that she actually visited the War Office in secret to plead his cause. The rest, as is said, is history - the Prince would leave for Zululand “*in the capacity of a spectator*.”

As a clinical psychologist, I believe Louis was destined from birth to become a neurotic extrovert. At first sight, this might indicate him to be a gregarious, flamboyant risk-taker keen to impress. He may well have appeared to everyone as such but in psychological terms, he had serious and destructive psychological problems. Before I proceed, I will define my terms. The eminent psychologist, Adler, originally defined neuroticism as the need to offset inner insecurity by displaying unusual behaviour. To a modern psychologist, a neurotic is one who coerces his environment – in order to gain control of events or people, or to be the centre of attention – a definition that clearly extends that of Adler. This need is usually based on childhood insecurity and subsequent neurotic behaviour is the adult attempt to redress such inner, even subconscious, insecurity. This deficiency neatly ties in with a modern interpretation of extrovertism. An extrovert is one who ‘shows out’ behaviour in order to make up for under-arousal, usually as a child. Children who are controlled or repressed, frequently because they have suffered the controlling influence of the parental ‘learning curve’ need, in teens and onwards, to express themselves to make up this deficiency. It is common for adventurers and ‘high flyers’ to come from strict families and many are the first born; subsequent siblings are more relaxed as their parents settle into parenthood.

The Prince Imperial certainly fits the criteria for classification as both a neurotic and an extrovert. His parents reared and educated him with one role in mind, to become the future Emperor of France. Sadly for

Louis, exile to England severely curtailed this process leaving him a victim and with every need to re-prove himself. It is no wonder that he employed his inner childhood tactics of showing off to gain credibility. In Zululand, Col. Buller despaired at Louis' irresponsibility typified by breaking away from patrols, sword held high, to pursue isolated Zulus. It is likely that Buller's despair and Lord Chelmsford's warnings actually encouraged Louis to maintain his seeming irresponsibility; after all, it made him the centre of attention – which he loved and desperately needed.

How much Louis' behaviour influenced the outcome of events during the fateful patrol on the 1st June 1879, we may never know. (3) His background and upbringing probably ensured that abnormality was his norm. In any event, the Zulus certainly fulfilled Louis' oft-stated childhood wish to be wounded to the front of his body!

References.

- (1) The salacious details of Eugénie's mother's life style are fully reported in David Duff's book.
- (2) Villiers always acted 'in loco parentis' to Eugénie; she lived under his protection in England for a number of years where she was known as 'Carrots' due to her auburn hair. Villiers later arranged her introduction to Napoleon III. His open affair with her mother continued until their advanced years.
- (3) This issue will be dealt with by author Ian Knight who is currently preparing a new book about the Prince Imperial.

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Family Tree of the Prince Imperial

