

**History of the Secret Societies
of the Army**

by Charles Nodier

A Cornerstone Book

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**History of the Secret Societies
of the Army**

HISTORY
OF THE
Secret Societies
OF THE
ARMY,
AND OF THE
MILITARY CONSPIRACIES
WHICH HAD FOR THEIR OBJECT
THE
DESTRUCTION
OF THE
GOVERNMENT OF BONAPARTE.

TRANSLATED FROM THE FRENCH.

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INTRODUCTION.

IF the subject of which I undertake to treat, had offered itself to the pen of Salust or Machiavel, the book which would have been produced from it, might have been recommended with confidence to all countries and to all ages, as one of the most precious monuments of history. The events which they have recorded, and to which their genius has imparted so powerful a charm, were far from presenting the degree of interest which distinguishes those that I am about to recite; and the character of the latter is such as in some measure to reassure me from the consciousness of my own inadequacy. Their importance must fix the attention of the reader, and retain a lasting hold of it, without there being any necessity of giving them a kind of merit which is beyond my reach. It may suffice for me, to state the plan of this work, in a few preliminary lines.

At the instant when Bonaparte was elevating himself, a rival party was forming in France, which had vowed his overthrow, and which was one day to effect it. This conspiracy has lasted fourteen years, has embraced all ranks, all states of society, has extended itself over the whole of Europe, and has finished by consummating the ruin of the tyranny, without being suspected, or, at least, without being known. Often frustrated in its boldest plans, in its best combined attempts, it has never been compromised within itself, and its essential secrets have never been penetrated. It has witnessed the successive fall of its most distinguished chiefs, of its most daring agents; but it has survived them; and ever powerful in the midst of its ruins which were incessantly repaired, it did not terminate the deadly war which it waged against despotism, until it had triumphed over it. Even at the present day, the mystery that surrounded it is only half dispelled. The great blows which it inflicted on the colossus that trampled on Europe, have disclosed its existence to some judi-

scious minds ; but it is guessed at, rather than discovered, and as yet it presents to undecided observers and historians, only a difficult problem which itself alone can solve.

Those who judge of events only by their effects, without being able to advert to the causes that produced them, or to the springs that were brought to act on them, are liable to form strange judgments concerning revolutionary times. For instance, I do not think there is one man of sense who could ever satisfy his own mind, as to the conspiracy of Moreau or that of Mallet, from the information that is afforded him by their prosecutions, and from the mutilated disclosures of which the pretended histories hitherto given of them are composed. The journey of Pichegru and of his companions in courage, devotedness, and misfortune, on the faith of an officer without credit, overwhelmed in debts, and little to be recommended for the profoundness of his views or the certainty of his conjectures, would appear the acmè of insanity, if the name of Mo-

reau had been the only guarantee of that enterprise, and if the report of Lajolais had been its sole incentive. The hesitation of Moreau would be no less inexplicable, at the moment when that hesitation was destroying the fruit of one of the most hazardous attempts of which history makes mention. The conspiracy of Mallet is of a still more romantic character, and its means are still less divined. It is not to be conceived, how a general, who has not even a certain military reputation, and who hardly wins the esteem of those who know him, otherwise than by a tenacity of opinion, which has never had any influence on the fate of his country, and by some inglorious misfortunes, succeeded, in no great number of hours, in drawing around him officers firmly devoted, and in menacing despotism in all its power with almost inevitable ruin. It is the secret of these great political problems which I propose to state, although I cannot but be conscious, even in the commencement of my task, that my recital must often appear improbable to those, to whom all the notions upon which it rests

are entirely new. I admit that few stories written at pleasure, under the inspiration of an exalted fancy, yield to this in point of singularity; and yet there is nothing which less resembles a romance. Six thousand Frenchmen have been confidentially acquainted with all the principal facts; and as to the facts which by their nature cannot have been communicated but to a small number of persons, more than twenty are now existing, who know them quite as well as myself. If I do not place my name at the head of these memoirs, the sequel will explain my reasons; and I do not the less on that account submit myself, in writing, to all the responsibility of a man of honour, who pledges himself to tell nothing but the truth, and to tell the whole truth, as far as he can, without infringing on his oaths, or hurting the personal interests of respectable persons. Yet I have long hesitated on publishing the facts of which I speak; and I must rapidly examine the consideration which determined me, although I do not think there is one man of good faith who can convert