

JEAN VICTOR MOREAU

JEAN VICTOR MOREAU, one of the most famous of French generals, was born at Morlaix, in Brittany, Aug. 11, 1763, and died at Laun, in Bohemia, in presence of the Emperors of Austria and Russia and the King of Prussia, Sept. 2, 1813. Educated for the law at Rennes, France, he forsook his studies to enter the army, and on the outbreak of the French Revolution he served first under Dumouriez, and afterward was made general of division and conducted a successful campaign in Flanders. At this period he lost his father, who was brought to the block at Paris on suspicion of having plotted with the noblesse Emigrés. In 1796, he obtained command of the army on the Moselle and the Rhine as successor to Pichegru. Here he defeated the Austrians, then at war with France in the interest of monarchy, but after checking the Archduke Karl and being menaced by a superior force, he made a masterly retreat and regained the Rhine. For a time he was deprived of his command, but was given another in Italy, where he saved the French army from destruction by the Russians, and returning to the Rhine drove the Austrians from their positions and won the victory of Hohenlinden. Napoleon, meanwhile, had become jealous of Moreau's military reputation, and taking advantage of some indiscreet speech he had made, which seemed to indicate participation in the Royalist plots of Pichegru and Cadoudal, Moreau was arrested, imprisoned, and sent into exile. This occurred in 1804, and gave rise to his defence, which is here appended. Though there was little evidence of the complicity with which he was charged, he was banished from France and came for some years to the New World, residing chiefly in New Jersey. Returning to Europe in 1813 he joined the allies, and in the battle of Dresden had both legs fractured by a cannon ball and died within a week in Bohemia, his remains being buried at St. Petersburg. His reputation as a general, supplemented by the "Memoirs" which were afterward published of him, perpetuate his fame in France as a great and successful soldier.

SPEECH IN HIS OWN DEFENCE

DELIVERED BEFORE THE SPECIAL CRIMINAL COURT, 16th PRAIRIAL
(JUNE 5), 1804

IN PRESENTING myself before you, I ask to be heard, for a short time, in my own person. My confidence in the defenders whom I have chosen is complete; I have unreservedly laid upon them the charge of defending my innocence. It is by their voice that I desire to address justice, but I feel the need of speaking with my own to you and to the nation.

Unfortunate circumstances, whether brought about by chance or produced by enmity, may cast a shadow upon some

(234)

moments of the life of the worthiest of men. A criminal may cleverly contrive to divert suspicion and proof of his crimes. The whole of a life is always the surest testimony against or in favor of an accused person. It is, then, my entire life that I oppose to the accusers who pursue me. It has been sufficiently public to be well known; I shall only recall certain epochs of it, and the witnesses whom I shall invoke are the French people and the peoples whom France has conquered.

I was intended for the profession of the law at the beginning of the revolution which was to found the liberty of the French people. That event changed the purpose of my life; I devoted myself to arms. I did not go and take my place among the soldiers of freedom from ambition; I embraced the military profession from respect for the rights of nations; I became a soldier because I was a citizen.

I bore that character with the colors; I have always preserved it. The more I loved liberty, the more submissive to discipline I was.

I rose rapidly enough, but always from rank to rank, never overstepping any, always by serving the country, never by flattering the committees. When I had attained the command-in-chief, when our victories sent us forward into the midst of nations who were our enemies, I was no less careful to make the character of the French people respected than I was to make their arms dreaded. War under my command was a scourge upon the battle-fields only. The nations and the powers with whom we waged war have more than once borne that testimony to me in the midst of their ravaged territories. This conduct was, in my belief, as well calculated as our victories to make conquests for France.

Even at the time when opposite maxims seemed to prevail

in the committees of the government, this line of action did not expose me to either calumny or persecution. No shadow had ever fallen upon the military glory which I had won, until that too famous day, the 18th Fructidor.

The persons who brought about the events of that day with so much rapidity reproached me with having been too slow to denounce a man whom I could only regard as a brother-in-arms until the moment when the evidence of facts and proofs made it plain to me that he was justly accused, and not only by unjust suspicion. The Directory, which alone was sufficiently well acquainted with my conduct to judge it fairly, and could not, as everybody knows, be disposed to regard me with indulgence, loudly declared how entirely irreproachable it held me to be. It gave me employment; the post was not brilliant; it soon became so.

I venture to believe that the nation has not forgotten how well worthy of it I have proved myself; it has not forgotten with what ready self-devotion I fought in Italy in subordinate posts; it has not forgotten how I was restored to the command-in-chief by the reverses of our arms, and remade general, so to speak, by our misfortunes. The nation remembers how twice I reconstructed an army of the remnants of those that had been dispersed, and how, after I had twice over put it into a condition to hold its own against the Russians and the Austrians, I twice over laid down the command to take one which was a greater trust.

I was not at that period of my life more republican than at every other, but I appeared a more prominent republican. The attention and the confidence of those to whom it belonged to give fresh movement and new direction to the Republic tended towards me in a more special way. It is well known that it was proposed to me to put myself at the head of an

enterprise closely resembling that of the 18th Brumaire. My ambition, if I had much, might easily have concealed itself under the appearance, or even openly boasted of the reality, of love of country.

The proposal was made to me by men who were celebrated in the Revolution for their patriotism, and in our national assemblies for their talents. I refused it; I believed myself called to command armies, but not to command the Republic.

That was enough to prove, it seems to me, that if I had an ambition it was not directed towards authority and power: soon afterwards I proved this better still.

The 18th Brumaire came, and I was in Paris. There was nothing to alarm my conscience in that Revolution which was brought about by others than me. It was directed by a man who was surrounded by a nimbus of fame; I might hope for happy results from it. I entered into it to second it, while other parties were pressing me to put myself at their head to oppose it. In Paris I received the orders of General Bonaparte. By having them executed I assisted to raise him to that high degree of power which circumstances rendered necessary.

When, some time afterwards, he offered me the command-in-chief of the army of the Rhine, I accepted it from him with as much zeal as from the hand of the Republic itself. My military successes were never more rapid, more numerous, more decisive than at the period when their lustre was shed upon that government which accuses me.

On returning from the scenes of all these achievements—the greatest was the having effectually secured the peace of the Continent—the triumphant soldier was greeted with acclamations that are a national recompense.

What a moment to choose for conspiring, if such a design had ever entered my mind!

The attachment of troops to the chiefs who have led them to victory is well known. Would an ambitious man, a conspirator, have let slip the opportunity, when he was at the head of an army of one hundred thousand men who had been so often victorious, and when he was returning to the midst of a nation still disturbed and always trembling for its principles and their duration?

My only thought was to disband the troops, and I retired into the repose of civil life.

In that repose, which was not devoid of glory, I enjoyed my honors, no doubt—those honors of which no human power can deprive me: the remembrance of my deeds, the testimony of my conscience, the esteem of my fellow countrymen and foreigners alike, and, if I may say so, the sweet and soothing foretaste of the judgment of posterity.

I was in the enjoyment of a fortune which was large only because my desires were not extravagant, and which was no reproach to my conscience. I had my retired pension also; assuredly I was content with my lot,—I, who had never envied the lot of any. My family and some friends—all the more precious because, as they had nothing to hope from my credit and my fortune, they could but be attached to myself alone—these possessions filled my whole mind, and neither desires nor ambition found any entrance into it. Would it be accessible to criminal projects?

This state of mind was so well known to be mine; it was so amply vouched for by the distance which I maintained from all the aims of ambition, that from the battle of Hohenlinden until my arrest my enemies have never been able to find, nor have they sought, any other crime whereof to accuse me, except the freedom of my speech. Well, it has often been favorable to the actions of the government; and if sometimes it has not been so, was I to think that such liberty was a crime

in a country which had so often affirmed by decree that thought, speech, and the press are free, and had enjoyed a great deal of liberty even under its kings?

I was born with a very frank disposition, and I have never been able to rid myself of that attribute of France in which I was born, either in the camp, where it flourished more than before, or in the Revolution, which has always proclaimed it a virtue in the man and a duty of the citizen. But do those who conspire blame what they disapprove quite so loudly? Such candor is hardly reconcilable with the plots and mysteries of politics.

If I had chosen to concoct and carry out plans of conspiracy I would have dissembled my feelings and endeavored to get every post which would have replaced me amid the forces of the nation.

I never possessed political genius to indicate such a course to me, but there were well-known examples which had been rendered conspicuous by success, and I had but to consider them. I know very well that Monk did not go away to a distance from the troops when he planned his conspiracy, and that Cassius and Brutus drew near to Cæsar previously to stabbing him.

And now, magistrates, I have nothing more to say to you. Such has been my character, such has been my whole life. In the presence of God and man I affirm the innocence and integrity of my conduct; you know what is your duty; France is listening to you, Europe is observing you, and posterity awaits you.

I am accused of being a brigand and a conspirator. The generous gentleman who has undertaken my defence will, I hope, convince you presently that such an accusation is ill-founded.