

Books and Reviews

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BERNADOTTE AND MALTA

In the lately published volume *BERNADOTTE AND NAPOLEON* by Sir Dunbar Plunket Barton (John Murray, 1921) reference is made to Malta in an entertaining anecdote which illustrates the famous Marshal's Gascon bluff not less than his ceaseless self-education.

"An amusing anecdote, illustrative of the ceaseless self-education by which Bernadotte gradually made himself an exceptionally well-informed man, has been told by a member of his staff. One day at dinner the conversation turned upon geography, the study of which Bernadotte recommended to his hearers. 'I'll wager,' he said, 'that none of you know the history, geography, and statistics of Malta.' Malta was much in evidence at the time, because it was a bone of contention between France and England. An aide-de-camp ventured to say that he was aware that Malta was an island in the Mediterranean, situated between Sicily and Africa, and that it was once ruled by an Order of knights. 'Add,' exclaimed Bernadotte with much animation, 'that it was given to them by Charles V; that it is eight leagues in length, and five in breadth; that it is rocky, covered with earth which had to be imported from other countries; that it is protected by impregnable fortifications; that it was surrendered to the French in 1798; that it is fertile in oranges, lemons, melons, vines, pomegranates, apricots, honey, cotton, and variegated mosses; that it has a population of 8,800, who speak Italian, French, modern Greek, and Arabic; and that its climate is always clear and serene. These, my young friends, are a few elementary facts which should be learned in the nursery, and which it is unpardonable for young officers to be ignorant of. I advise you to attend to your studies.' The aide-de-camp and his brother officers remained stupefied by this display of erudition, until one of them, having reason to go to the General's apartments, found on his table an open book, written by a Professor of Rennes from whom the General was receiving instruction, which contained all the information that had fallen from him, just as he had repeated it."

SOMMARIO

Aprile 1922

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