

home from India.

The next day Napoleon and Cockburn rode out to Longwood. The road from Jamestown to Longwood is rugged. Today it is a well-kept tarmac road, but in those times it was nothing more than a track. From Jamestown it climbs the eastern side of the valley in a series of steep hairpins, until it reaches the crest at Two Gun Saddle, then swings inland generally following the crest, climbing all the time towards the central massif. It passes Alarm Cottage and Alarm House, where for a time some of Napoleon's aides were lodged; it skirts the grounds of "Prospect", one of the oldest houses on the island, now the residence of the manager of the Agents, Solomon & Co. At St. Matthew's Church at Hutts Gate, the road bears left as it skirts the head of the Sans Valley. At one time in the valley just below Hutts Gate, there was a spring and a grove of willows. It was to become Napoleon's favourite place, and he frequently used to go and sit there, and in the end it is where they buried him. From St. Margaret's Church the road slopes down to Longwood Plain and Longwood House.

Napoleon appeared to be satisfied with the house, and it was decided then that this was to be his permanent home. No one told him that, as the house stood at an elevation of 1,700 ft. in winter it was frequently wreathed in mist and rain and was exposed to the full force of the everlasting south-east trades!

On the way up Napoleon had noticed a pretty house set in pleasant trees, situated on a knoll at the head of the James Valley. He asked what it was called and was told that it was the "Briars", the home of the purveyor to the East India Company, one William Balcombe. On the return he asked to be taken there. This request was to result in one of the strangest friendships in history, that between an Emperor of France and a hoydenish teenage English girl. Betsy Balcombe was 13 when she and her elder sister Jane, first met Napoleon, and by contemporary paintings was a very pretty girl. By the time she left the island three years later she had developed into a very beautiful young woman, and although there is no doubt that her friendship with Napoleon was above any form of reproach, it was to cause her considerable embarrassment later in life. She treated him like a benevolent uncle and her in his turn like a wayward niece. They teased each other unmercifully and some of their exchanges appalled his court, as for instance when she seemed uncertain, after he had asked her who had burnt Moscow, he cried "It was I, it was I," and laughed uproariously at her pert reply, "I thought it was the Russians to get rid of the French".

Next to the main house of the "Briars" was a small pavilion, consisting at that time of one room and two tiny attics. Napoleon had no intention of spending another night at the Porteous House, and he asked if he could be permitted to stay in the

pavilion until "Longwood" was ready for him. The two months he spent at the "Briars" was to be the most idyllic time of his whole exile, dictating his memoirs, playing with the Balcombe children and the quiet evening spent with the family. His court did not think so much of it, for except for the de Las Cases and his valet Marchand, who slept in the attics, the remainder were in uncomfortable lodgings in Jamestown, and had to make the daily journey from there to attend on their Lord and Master.

By December it was considered that the alterations to "Longwood" were sufficiently far advanced for it to be occupied and Napoleon moved in there, although to start with not all his aides could be accommodated. The first few months at "Longwood" were pleasant enough, it was warm but without the humid heat of Jamestown; the security precautions were irksome, to be sure, but certainly not oppressive, and Napoleon was able to take long rides with only a minimum of attendants. The Balcombes and Admiral Cockburn among others were frequent visitors. Admiral Cockburn and Napoleon had developed a mutual respect for each other, and although Cockburn was officially Napoleon's goaler, their meetings were cordial, except that Cockburn infuriated Napoleon by punctiliously calling him by the title decided upon by the British Government, "General Bonaparte". (Napoleon was heard to mutter that the last the world had heard of General Bonaparte was in Egypt, fifteen years ago!) Altogether Napoleon's court at "Longwood" was rapidly becoming the centre of island society. Then in April, 1816, Sir Hudson Lowe came as governor, and nothing was ever the same again.

It is not within the scope of this article to analyse the feud that existed between Napoleon and Sir Hudson Lowe. Scores of people have done so previously and, depending where their allegiance lay, have given scores of different answers. There were probably faults on both sides, although I

think that the kindest thing that can be said of Hudson Lowe was that he was the wrong man, doing a difficult job badly. He was born in Ireland in the same year as Napoleon; entered the army at eighteen and because he had no influence or money with which to buy promotion (this was common practice, even Wellington bought a number of his promotions), had to rely on hard work. He was a gifted linguist. He had twice raised and commanded regiments known as Corsican Rangers. As these were composed of Royalist emigres and deserters, this apart from anything else was unlikely to endear him to Napoleon, and this was probably the basis of the quarrel, as Napoleon took it as a direct insult that a man with this background should be put over him. On the face of it, it seems to have been a very tactless appointment, or was it done deliberately? Wellington, who was no mean judge of men and had managed to have Lowe removed from his staff just prior to Waterloo, called him "a damned silly old fool".

Except for having to reduce the number of Napoleon's staff and reducing the upkeep of "Longwood" from £12,000 to £8,000 a year, Lowe's instructions from London for the safety and security of Napoleon differed very little from those given to Admiral Cockburn. However, his ruthless enforcing of all the petty restrictions, limiting Napoleon's riding and visiting, making sure that an officer sighted him so many times a day, and countless other indignities caused Cockburn's successor, Admiral Malcolm, the Allied Commissioners and even Lowe's own wife to complain that he was being too harsh. It was no use. (In 1816 he had the Balcombes sent off the island because of their continued friendship with Napoleon.) Eventually in August, 1816, it came to a head, resulting in a furious row, in which both lost their tempers, after which Napoleon refused to speak to Lowe again. When Lowe next saw him, Napoleon was dead.

*continued overleaf*



JAMESTOWN, St. HELENA ISLAND

ROLAND SVENSSON