

Le voyageur enthousiaste observe ... (No. 19)

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(Journées dermatologiques de Paris), Paris, France*

It is still the biggest clinical meeting in Europe, second only to that of the American Academy of Dermatology. Earlier on, one might have thought the journées would be held forever in the hallowed premises of the Hôpital Saint-Louis; this has not been the case any more for several years. The Palais de Congrès is conveniently located at the Air Terminal Porte Maillot and therefore permits easy access and offers plenty of space. The Société Française d'Histoire de la Dermatologie, the only such society in Europe, held its meeting in the lap of the mother society, and a handful of speakers from Britain, France, Italy and Austria discussed the development of venereology in Europe and its eventual merger with dermatology. The last evening, a 'soirée de gala' was staged under the Pyramid of the Louvre, started off with two presentations on Egyptian mummy skin (*La peau des pharaons, une parcelle d'éternité*) and a subsequent discussion, courtesy of Leo pharmaceuticals. Part of the Egyptian collection of the Louvre was open for the attendees. When I recall my repeated visits to Paris, coming in on foot at first, in 1952, I am ever so much impressed by the grandeur of the city. The Louvre alone with its subterranean avenues of access and the pyramid itself are new marvels, non-pareils, impressive time and again.

La Malmaison – another visit to the château after more than 5 years – snow flurries then, drenched in rain today. The former residence of Joséphine de Beauharnais, Napoleon's lover and erstwhile wife, is a sleeping beauty where time seemed to stand still when she died, 1 year before Waterloo. A national monument by today, the Renaissance-style building, with the lovely preserved interior, and the garden full of many selected plants have their own melancholic

charme [1]. Gone are the merry days of Madame du Molay, the last lady of the manor in the Ancien Régime to whom Abbé Delille directed his verses. He invoked the god of 'le Ruisseau de la Malmaison' in this 'heureuse retraite/Vous voit rêver souvent au doux bruit de son eau/Vienne s'unir à cette aimable fête' [1]. Today, sadness hovers around the 'Cedar of Marengo', planted by the lady of the house in 1800. Napoleon divorced Joséphine to marry a real princess, a *raison d'état*?! Marie-Louise of Hapsburg followed Joséphine as his legal consort. Browsing through the magnificent library and its carefully preserved shelves, Napoleon's eagle is ubiquitously visible on its volumes. Some of the most beautiful books, bound in red maroquin, show this eagle matched with the Hapsburg-Lorraine crest of Marie-Louise. History has no mercy.

Personal memories come to my mind. I buy a complete edition of Joséphine's letters, find out that she wrote one on this very day, November 23 (in 1803) [2], documenting her deep personal interest and care of the botanical collection in Malmaison and beyond. Driving back to town through the mist and drizzle of the late morning, I pack up and head home.

- 1 Hubert G: Malmaison. Paris, Réunion des musées nationaux, 1989.
- 2 Chevallier B, Catinat M, Pincemaille C: Impératrice Joséphine, correspondance, 1782–1814. Histoire Payot Series. Paris, Payot & Rivages, 1996, No. 209, pp 137–138, à M. Cazeaux.