

Chapter 36

SCULPTURE AND PAINTING

When Roland returned to the Luxembourg, the clock of the palace marked one hour and a quarter after mid-day.

The First Consul was working with Bourrienne.

If we were merely writing a novel, we should hasten to its close, and in order to get there more expeditiously we should neglect certain details, which, we are told, historical figures can do without. That is not our opinion. From the day we first put pen to paper--now some thirty years ago--whether our thought were concentrated on a drama, or whether it spread itself into a novel, we have had a double end--to instruct and to amuse.

And we say instruct first, for amusement has never been to our mind anything but a mask for instruction. Have we succeeded? We think so. Before long we shall have covered with our narratives an enormous period of time; between the "Comtesse de Salisbury" and the "Comte de Monte-Cristo" five centuries and a half are comprised. Well, we assert that we have taught France as much history about those five centuries and a half as any historian.

More than that; although our opinions are well known; although, under the Bourbons of the elder branch as under the Bourbons of the younger branch, under the Republic as under the present government, we have always proclaimed them loudly, we do not believe that that opinion has been unduly manifested in our books and dramas.

We admire the Marquis de Posa in Schiller's "Don Carlos"; but, in his stead, we should not have anticipated the spirit of that age to the point of placing a philosopher of the eighteenth century among the heroes of the sixteenth, an encyclopedist at the court of Philippe II. Therefore, just as we have been--in

literary parlance--monarchical under the Monarchy, republican under the Republic, we are to-day reconstructionists under the Consulate.

That does not prevent our thought from hovering above men, above their epoch, and giving to each the share of good and evil they do. Now that share no one, except God, has the right to award from his individual point of view. The kings of Egypt who, at the moment they passed into the unknown, were judged upon the threshold of their tombs, were not judged by a man, but by a people. That is why it is said: "The judgment of a people is the judgment of God."

Historian, novelist, poet, dramatic author, we are nothing more than the foreman of a jury who impartially sums up the arguments and leaves the jury to give their verdict. The book is the summing up; the readers are the jury.

That is why, having to paint one of the most gigantic figures, not only of modern times but of all times; having to paint the period of his transition, that is to say the moment when Bonaparte transformed himself into Napoleon, the general into an emperor--that is why we say, in the fear of becoming unjust, we abandon interpretations and substitute facts.

We are not of those who say with Voltaire that, "no one is a hero to his valet."

It may be that the valet is near-sighted or envious--two infirmities that resemble each other more closely than people think. We maintain that a hero may become a kind man, but a hero, for being kind, is none the less a hero.

What is a hero in the eyes of the public? A man whose genius is momentarily greater than his heart. What is a hero in private life? A man whose heart is momentarily greater than his genius.

Historians, judge the genius!

People, judge the heart!

Who judged Charlemagne? The historians. Who judged Henri IV.? The people. Which, in your opinion, was the most righteously judged?

Well, in order to render just judgment, and compel the court of appeals, which is none other than posterity, to confirm contemporaneous judgments, it is essential not to light up one side only of the figure we depict, but to walk around it, and wherever the sunlight does not reach, to hold a torch, or even a candle.

Now, let us return to Bonaparte.

He was working, as we said, with Bourrienne. Let us inquire into the usual division of the First Consul's time.

He rose at seven or eight in the morning, and immediately called one of his secretaries, preferably Bourrienne, and worked with him until ten. At ten, breakfast was announced; Josephine, Hortense and Eugène either waited or sat down to table with the family, that is with the aides-de-camp on duty and Bourrienne. After breakfast he talked with the usual party, or the invited guests, if there were any; one hour was devoted to this intercourse, which was generally shared by the First Consul's two brothers, Lucien and Joseph, Regnault de Saint-Jean-d'Angely, Boulay (de la Meurthe), Monge, Berthollet, Laplace and Arnault. Toward noon Cambacérès arrived. As a general thing Bonaparte devoted half an hour to his chancellor; then suddenly, without warning, he would rise and say: "Au revoir, Josephine! au revoir, Hortense! Come, Bourrienne, let us go to work."

This speech, which recurred almost regularly in the same words, was no sooner uttered than Bonaparte left the salon and returned to his study.

There, no system of work was adopted; it might be some urgent matter or merely a caprice. Either Bonaparte dictated or Bourrienne read, after which the First Consul went to the council.

In the earlier months of the Consulate, he was obliged to cross the courtyard of the little Luxembourg to reach the council-chamber, which, if the weather were rainy, put him in bad humor; but toward the end of December he had the courtyard covered; and from that time he almost always returned to his study singing. Bonaparte sang almost as false as Louis XV.

As soon as he was back he examined the work he had ordered done, signed his letters, and stretched himself out in his armchair, the arms of which he stabbed with his penknife as he talked. If he was not inclined to talk, he reread the letters of the day before, or the pamphlets of the day, laughing at intervals with the hearty laugh of a great child. Then suddenly, as one awakening from a dream, he would spring to his feet and cry out: "Write, Bourrienne!"

Then he would sketch out the plan for some building to be erected, or dictate some one of those vast projects which have amazed--let us say rather, terrified the world.

At five o'clock he dined; after dinner the First Consul ascended to Josephine's apartments, where he usually received the visits of the ministers, and particularly that of the minister of foreign affairs, M. de Talleyrand. At midnight, sometimes earlier, but never later, he gave the signal for retiring by saying, brusquely: "Let us go to bed."

The next day, at seven in the morning, the same life began over again, varied only by unforeseen incidents.

After these details of the personal habits of the great genius we are trying to depict under his first aspect, his personal portrait ought, we think, to come.

Bonaparte, First Consul, has left fewer indications of his personal appearance than Napoleon, Emperor. Now, as nothing less resembles the Emperor of 1812 than the First Consul of 1800; let us endeavor, if possible, to sketch with a pen those features which the brush has never fully portrayed, that countenance which neither bronze nor marble has been able to render. Most of the painters and sculptors who flourished during this illustrious period of art--Gros, David, Prud'hon, Girodet and Bosio--have endeavored to transmit to posterity the features of the Man of Destiny, at the different epochs when the vast providential vistas which beckoned him first revealed themselves. Thus, we have portraits of Bonaparte, commander-in-chief, Bonaparte, First Consul, and Napoleon, Emperor; and although some painters and sculptors have caught more or less successfully the type of his face, it may be said that there does not exist, either of the general, the First Consul, or the emperor, a single portrait or bust which perfectly resembles him.

It was not within the power of even genius to triumph over an impossibility. During the first part of Bonaparte's life it was possible to paint or chisel Bonaparte's protuberant skull, his brow furrowed by the sublime line of thought, his pale elongated face, his granite complexion, and the meditative character of his countenance. During the second part of his life it was possible to paint or to chisel his broadened forehead, his admirably defined eyebrows, his straight nose, his close-pressed lips, his chin modelled with rare perfection, his whole face, in short, like a coin of Augustus. But that which neither his bust nor his portrait could render, which was utterly beyond the domain of imitation, was the mobility of his look; that look which is to man what the lightning is to God, namely, the proof of his divinity.

In Bonaparte, that look obeyed his will with the rapidity of lightning; in one and the same minute it dared from beneath his eyelids, now keen and piercing as the blade of a dagger violently unsheathed, now soft as a sun ray or a kiss, now stern as a challenge, or terrible as a threat.

Bonaparte had a look for every thought that stirred his soul. In Napoleon, this look, except in the momentous circumstances of his life, ceased to be mobile and became fixed, but even so it was none the less impossible to render; it was a drill sounding the heart of whosoever he looked upon, the deepest, the most secret thought of which he meant to sound. Marble or

painting might render the fixedness of that look, but neither the one nor the other could portray its life--that is to say, its penetrating and magnetic action. Troubled hearts have veiled eyes.

Bonaparte, even in the days of his leanness, had beautiful hands, and he displayed them with a certain coquetry. As he grew stouter his hands became superb; he took the utmost care of them, and looked at them when talking, with much complacency. He felt the same satisfaction in his teeth, which were handsome, though not with the splendor of his hands.

When he walked, either alone or with some one, whether in a room or in a garden, he always bent a little forward, as though his head were heavy to carry, and crossed his hands behind his back. He frequently made an involuntary movement with the right shoulder, as if a nervous shudder had passed through it, and at the same time his mouth made a curious movement from right to left, which seemed to result from the other. These movements, however, had nothing convulsive about them, whatever may have been said notwithstanding; they were a simple trick indicative of great preoccupation, a sort of congestion of the mind. It was chiefly manifested when the general, the First Consul, or the Emperor, was maturing vast plans. It was after such promenades, accompanied by this twofold movement of the shoulders and lips, that he dictated his most important notes. On a campaign, with the army, on horseback, he was indefatigable; he was almost as much so in ordinary life, and would often walk five or six hours in succession without perceiving it.

When he walked thus with some one with whom he was familiar, he commonly passed his arm through that of his companion and leaned upon him.

Slender and thin as he was at the period when we place him before our readers' eyes, he was much concerned by the fear of future corpulence; it was to Bourrienne that he usually confided this singular dread.

"You see, Bourrienne, how slim and abstemious I am. Well, nothing can rid me of the idea that when I am forty I shall be a great eater and very fat. I

foresee that my constitution will undergo a change. I take exercise enough, but what will you!--it's a presentiment; and it won't fail to happen."

We all know to what obesity he attained when a prisoner at Saint Helena.

He had a positive passion for baths, which no doubt contributed not a little to make him fat; this passion became an irresistible need. He took one every other day, and stayed in it two hours, during which time the journals and pamphlets of the day were read to him. As the water cooled he would turn the hot-water faucet until he raised the temperature of his bathroom to such a degree that the reader could neither bear it any longer, nor see to read. Not until then would he permit the door to be opened.

It has been said that he was subject to epileptic attacks after his first campaign in Italy. Bourrienne was with him eleven years, and never saw him suffer from an attack of this malady.

Bonaparte, though indefatigable when necessity demanded it, required much sleep, especially during the period of which we are now writing. Bonaparte, general or First Consul, kept others awake, but he slept, and slept well. He retired at midnight, sometimes earlier, as we have said, and when at seven in the morning they entered his room to awaken him he was always asleep. Usually at the first call he would rise; but occasionally, still half asleep, he would mutter: "Bourrienne, I beg of you, let me sleep a little longer."

Then, if there was nothing urgent, Bourrienne would return at eight o'clock; if it was otherwise, he insisted, and then, with much grumbling, Bonaparte would get up. He slept seven, sometimes eight, hours out of the twenty-four, taking a short nap in the afternoon. He also gave particular instruction for the night.

"At night," he would say, "come in my room as seldom as possible. Never wake me if you have good news to announce--good news can wait; but if

there is bad news, wake me instantly, for then there is not a moment to be lost in facing it."

As soon as Bonaparte had risen and made his morning ablutions, which were very thorough, his valet entered and brushed his hair and shaved him; while he was being shaved, a secretary or an aide-de-camp read the newspapers aloud, always beginning with the "Moniteur." He gave no real attention to any but the English and German papers.

"Skip that," he would say when they read him the French papers; "_I know what they say, because they only say what I choose._"

His toilet completed, Bonaparte went down to his study. We have seen above what he did there. At ten o'clock the breakfast as announced, usually by the steward, in these words: "The general is served." No title, it will be observed, not even that of First Consul.

The repast was a frugal one. Every morning a dish was served which Bonaparte particularly liked--a chicken fried in oil with garlic; the same dish that is now called on the bills of fare at restaurants "Chicken à la Marengo."

Bonaparte drank little, and then only Bordeaux or Burgundy, preferably the latter. After breakfast, as after dinner, he drank a cup of black coffee; never between meals. When he chanced to work until late at night they brought him, not coffee, but chocolate, and the secretary who worked with him had a cup of the same. Most historians, narrators, and biographers, after saying that Bonaparte drank a great deal of coffee, add that he took snuff to excess.

They are doubly mistaken. From the time he was twenty-four, Bonaparte had contracted the habit of taking snuff: but only enough to keep his brain awake. He took it habitually, not, as biographers have declared, from the pocket of his waistcoat, but from a snuff-box which he changed almost every day for a new one--having in this matter of collecting snuff-boxes a certain resemblance to the great Frederick. If he ever did take snuff from his

waistcoat pocket, it was on his battle days, when it would have been difficult, while riding at a gallop under fire, to hold both reins and snuff-box. For those days he had special waistcoats, with the right-hand pocket lined with perfumed leather; and, as the sloping cut of his coat enabled him to insert his thumb and forefinger into this pocket without unbuttoning his coat, he could, under any circumstances and at any gait, take snuff when he pleased.

As general or First Consul, he never wore gloves, contenting himself with holding and crumpling them in his left hand. As Emperor, there was some advance in this propriety; he wore one glove, and as he changed his gloves, not once, but two or three times a day, his valet adopted the habit of giving him alternate gloves; thus making one pair serve as two.

Bonaparte had two great passions which Napoleon inherited--for war and architectural monuments to his fame.

Gay, almost jolly in camp, he was dreamy and sombre in repose. To escape this gloom he had recourse to the electricity of art, and saw visions of those gigantic monumental works of which he undertook many, and completed some. He realized that such works are part of the life of peoples; they are history written in capitals, landmarks of the ages, left standing long after generations are swept away. He knew that Rome lives in her ruins, that Greece speaks by her statues, that Egypt, splendid and mysterious spectre, appeared through her monuments on the threshold of civilized existence.

What he loved above everything, what he hugged in preference to all else, was renown, heroic uproar; hence his need of war, his thirst for glory. He often said:

"A great reputation is a great noise; the louder it is, the further it is heard. Laws, institutions, monuments, nations, all fall; but sound remains and resounds through other generations. Babylon and Alexandria are fallen; Semiramis and Alexander stand erect, greater perhaps through the echo of their renown, waxing and multiplying through the ages, than they were in their lifetimes." Then he added, connecting these ideas with himself: "My

power depends on my fame and on the battles I win. Conquest has made me what I am, and conquest alone can sustain me. A new born government must dazzle, must amaze. The moment it no longer flames, it dies out; once it ceases to grow, it falls."

He was long a Corsican, impatient under the conquest of his country; but after the 13th Vendemiaire he became a true Frenchman, and ended by loving France with true passion. His dream was to see her great, happy, powerful, at the head of the nations in glory and in art. It is true that, in making France great, he became great with her, and attached his name indissolubly to her grandeur. To him, living eternally in this thought, actuality disappeared in the future; wherever the hurricane of war may have swept him, France, above all things else, above all nations, filled his thoughts. "What will my Athenians think?" said Alexander, after Issus and Arbela. "I hope the French will be content with me," said Bonaparte, after Rivoli and the Pyramids.

Before battle, this modern Alexander gave little thought to what he should do in case of victory, but much in case of defeat. He, more than any man, was convinced that trifles often decide the greatest events; he was therefore more concerned in foreseeing such events than in producing them. He watched them come to birth, and ripen; then, when the right time came, he appeared, laid his hand on them, mastered and guided them, as an able rider roasters and guides a spirited horse.

His rapid rise in the midst of revolutions and political changes he had brought about, or seen accomplished, the events which he had controlled, had given him a certain contempt for men; moreover, he was not inclined by nature to think well of them. His lips were often heard to utter the grievous maxim--all the more grievous because he personally knew its truth--"There are two levers by which men are moved, fear and self-interest."

With such opinions Bonaparte did not, in fact, believe in friendship.

"How often," said Bourrienne, "has he said to me, 'Friendship is only a word; I love no one, not even my brothers--Joseph a little possibly; but if I love him

it is only from habit, and because he is my elder. Duroc, yes, I love him; but why? Because his character pleases me; because he is stern, cold, resolute; besides, Duroc never sheds a tear. But why should I love any one? Do you think I have any true friends? As long as I am what I am, I shall have friends--apparently at least; but when my luck ceases, you'll see! Trees don't have leaves in winter. I tell you, Bourrienne, we must leave whimpering to the women, it's their business; as for me, no feelings. I need a vigorous hand and a stout heart; if not, better let war and government alone."

In his familiar intercourse, Bonaparte was what schoolboys call a tease; but his teasings were never spiteful, and seldom unkind. His ill-humor, easily aroused, disappeared like a cloud driven by the wind; it evaporated in words, and disappeared of its own will. Sometimes, however, when matters of public import were concerned, and his lieutenants or ministers were to blame, he gave way to violent anger; his outbursts were then hard and cruel, and often humiliating. He gave blows with a club, under which, willingly or unwillingly, the recipient had to bow his head; witness his scene with Jomini and that with the Duc de Bellune.

Bonaparte had two sets of enemies, the Jacobins and the royalists; he detested the first and feared the second. In speaking of the Jacobins, he invariably called them the murderers of Louis XVI.; as for the royalists, that was another thing; one might almost have thought he foresaw the Restoration. He had about him two men who had voted the death of the king, Fouché and Cambacérès.

He dismissed Fouché, and, if he kept Cambacérès, it was because he wanted the services of that eminent legist; but he could not endure him, and he would often catch his colleague, the Second Consul, by the ear, and say: "My poor Cambacérès, I'm so sorry for you; but your goose is cooked. If ever the Bourbons get back they will hang you."

One day Cambacérès lost his temper, and with a twist of his head he pulled his ear from the living pincers that held it.

"Come," he said, "have done with your foolish joking."

Whenever Bonaparte escaped any danger, a childish habit, a Corsican habit, reappeared; he always made a rapid sign of the cross on his breast with the thumb.

Whenever he met with any annoyance, or was haunted with a disagreeable thought, he hummed--what air? An air of his own that was no air at all, and which nobody ever noticed, he sang so false. Then, still singing, he would sit down before his writing desk, tilting in his chair, tipping it back till he almost fell over, and mutilating, as we have said, its arms with a penknife, which served no other purpose, inasmuch as he never mended a pen himself. His secretaries were charged with that duty, and they mended them in the best manner possible, mindful of the fact that they would have to copy that terrific writing, which, as we know, was not absolutely illegible.

The effect produced on Bonaparte by the ringing of bells is known. It was the only music he understood, and it went straight to his heart. If he was seated when the vibrations began he would hold up his hand for silence, and lean toward the sound. If he was walking, he would stop, bend his head, and listen. As long as the bell rang he remained motionless; when the sound died away in space, he resumed his work, saying to those who asked him to explain this singular liking for the iron voice: "It reminds me of my first years at Brienne; I was happy then!"

At the period of which we are writing, his greatest personal interest was the purchase he had made of the domain of Malmaison. He went there every night like a schoolboy off for his holiday, and spent Sunday and often Monday there. There, work was neglected for walking expeditions, during which he personally superintended the improvements he had ordered. Occasionally, and especially at first, he would wander beyond the limits of the estate; but these excursions were thought dangerous by the police, and given up entirely after the conspiracy of the Aréna and the affair of the infernal machine.

The revenue derived from Malmaison, calculated by Bonaparte himself, on the supposition that he should sell his fruits and vegetables, did not amount to more than six thousand francs.

"That's not bad," he said to Bourrienne; "but," he added with a sigh, "one must have thirty thousand a year to be able to live here."

Bonaparte introduced a certain poesy in his taste for the country. He liked to see a woman with a tall flexible figure glide through the dusky shrubberies of the park; only that woman must be dressed in white. He hated gowns of a dark color and had a horror of stout women. As for pregnant women, he had such an aversion for them that it was very seldom he invited one to his soirées or his fêtes. For the rest, with little gallantry in his nature, too overbearing to attract, scarcely civil to women, it was rare for him to say, even to the prettiest, a pleasant thing; in fact, he often produced a shudder by the rude remarks he made even to Josephine's best friends. To one he remarked: "Oh! what red arms you have!" To another, "What an ugly headdress you are wearing!" To a third, "Your gown is dirty; I have seen you wear it twenty times"; or, "Why don't you change your dressmaker; you are dressed like a fright."

One day he said to the Duchesse de Chevreuse, a charming blonde, whose hair was the admiration of everyone:

"It's queer how red your hair is!"

"Possibly," replied the duchess, "but this is the first time any man has told me so."

Bonaparte did not like cards; when he did happen to play it was always vingt-et-un. For the rest, he had one trait in common with Henry IV., he cheated; but when the game was over he left all the gold and notes he had won on the table, saying:

"You are ninnyes! I have cheated all the time we've been playing, and you never found out. Those who lost can take their money back."

Born and bred in the Catholic faith, Bonaparte had no preference for any dogma. When he re-established divine worship it was done as a political act, not as a religious one. He was fond, however, of discussions bearing on the subject; but he defined his own part in advance by saying: "My reason makes me a disbeliever in many things; but the impressions of my childhood and the inspirations of my early youth have flung me back into uncertainty."

Nevertheless he would never hear of materialism; he cared little what the dogma was, provided that dogma recognized a Creator. One beautiful evening in Messidor, on board his vessel, as it glided along between the twofold azure of the sky and sea, certain mathematicians declared there was no God, only animated matter. Bonaparte looked at the celestial arch, a hundred times more brilliant between Malta and Alexandria than it is in Europe, and, at a moment when they thought him unconscious of the conversation, he exclaimed, pointing to the stars: "You may say what you please, but it was a God who made all that."

Bonaparte, though very exact in paying his private debts, was just the reverse about public expenses. He was firmly convinced that in all past transactions between ministers and purveyors or contractors, that if the minister who had made the contract was not a dupe, the State at any rate was robbed; for this reason he delayed the period of payment as long as possible; there were literally no evasions, no difficulties he would not make, no bad reasons he would not give. It was a fixed idea with him, an immutable principle, that every contractor was a cheat.

One day a man who had made a bid that was accepted was presented to him.

"What is your name?" he asked, with his accustomed brusqueness.

"Vollant, citizen First Consul."

"Good name for a contractor."

"I spell it with two l's, citizen."

"To rob the better, sir," retorted Bonaparte, turning his back on him.

Bonaparte seldom changed his decisions, even when he saw they were unjust. No one ever heard him say: "I was mistaken." On the contrary, his favorite saying was: "I always believe the worst"--a saying more worthy of Simon than Augustus.

But with all this, one felt that there was more of a desire in Bonaparte's mind to seem to despise men than actual contempt for them. He was neither malignant nor vindictive. Sometimes, it is true, he relied too much upon necessity, that iron-tipped goddess; but for the rest, take him away from the field of politics and he was kind, sympathetic, accessible to pity, fond of children (great proof of a kind and pitying heart), full of indulgence for human weakness in private life, and sometimes of a good-humored heartiness, like that of Henri IV. playing with his children in the presence of the Spanish ambassador.

If we were writing history we should have many more things to say of Bonaparte without counting those which--after finishing with Bonaparte--we should still have to say of Napoleon. But we are writing a simple narrative, in which Bonaparte plays a part; unfortunately, wherever Bonaparte shows himself, if only for a moment, he becomes, in spite of himself, a principal personage.

The reader must pardon us for having again fallen into digression; that man, who is a world in himself, has, against our will, swept us along in his whirlwind.

Let us return to Roland, and consequently to our legitimate tale.