NAPOLEON AND THE AGE OF NATIONALISM

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A sincere patriotism, a deep attachment to the soil and people of France, inspired Robespierre. It provided a moving lyrical undertone to the tragic sternness of his reports: "Yes, this delightful land which we inhabit and which nature caresses with love is made to be the domain of liberty and happiness; this sensitive and proud people is truly born for glory and virtue. O my fatherland, if fate had caused me to be born in a foreign and distant country, I would have addressed heaven continuously with wishes for thy prosperity; I would have been moved to tears by the recital of thy combats and thy virtues; my attentive soul would have followed with a restless ardor all the movements of thy glorious revolution; I would have envied the fate of thy citizens; I would have envied that of thy representatives. I am French, I am one of thy representatives. . . O sublime people! Accept the sacrifices of my whole being; happy is the man who is born in your midst; happier is he who can die for your happiness."

This feeling for France was unknown to Napoleon. At no time in his life had he the desire to die for the happiness of the French people. He knew patriotic sentiments in his youth: the rhetorical patriotism of a late-eighteenth-century adolescence which had been instructed by the classics and Rousseau. It was, however, a patriotism directed against France. Napoleon the Corsican shared his fellow-countrymen's hatred of their French conquerors and their admiration for Pasquale Paoli, the leader of the Corsican fight for independence in which he longed to join. What attracted him most to Jean-Jacques Rousseau in his early youth was the latter's idolization of primitive agrarian Corsica.4 "My relatives, my country, and my veneration for Paoli and Rousseau were my only passion," Napoleon wrote later of this period of his life. When, at the age of ten, he entered the military school of Brienne, Napoleon knew little French. "As I still spoke French badly, and found it hard to accustom myself to a completely different mode of living, I generally kept away from my companions at first and preferred to occupy myself with my books. Extraordinarily sensitive as I was, I suffered infinitely from the ridicule of my schoolmates, who used to jeer at me as a foreigner. My pride and sense of honor would tolerate no insult to my country"—Corsica!—"or to the beloved national hero Paoli."

At the beginning of 1786 the young Buonaparte received his commission as a sublieutenant in the French garrison town of Valence. There his thoughts returned incessantly to his native land; the words which he wrote in May 1786 were characteristic of his feeling throughout

4 See Hans Kohn, The idea of nationalism (New York, 1944), pp. 253-54. Napoleon later wrote that, up to the age of sixteen: "I would have fought for Rousseau against all the friends of Voltaire. Today it is the opposite. Since I have seen the East, Rousseau is repugnant to me. The wild man without morals is a dog" (F. M. Kircheisen, Napoleon's autobiography: the personal memoirs of Bonaparte, compiled from his own letters and diaries, trans. Frederick Collins [New York, 1931], p. 253).
the period: "What tragedy awaits me in my country! My fellow countrymen are loaded with chains! and have to bear, trembling, the weight of the oppressor’s hand!"—the oppressor was the king of France, whose uniform Napoleon wore.

“You Frenchmen! It is not enough that you have robbed us of what we love the most, you have even destroyed our manners and customs! What attitude shall I adopt, how shall I speak when I arrive in my country? When his country no longer exists, a good citizen should die. If one man could save my countrymen by sacrificing his life, I would at once rise and thrust the avenging sword into the breast of the tyrant in order to revenge my country and its injured rights.”

For the French people the Revolution meant a full awakening to nationalism; for Napoleon its influence was different. He abandoned his Corsican patriotism to embrace the Revolutionary cause. Was he swayed by the promise of liberty it held out to French and Corsicans alike? Political liberty soon came to have as little meaning for him as did nationalism, but he sensed the dynamic possibilities in this enthusiastic upsurge of a great people. Edmund Burke had wrongly believed that the Revolution dealt a mortal blow to French strength, leaving the country a great void. Mirabeau, in a memorandum which he sent in September 1792 by Comte de La Marck to Emperor Leopold II, remarked that Burke "has said something very stupid, for this void is a volcano, the subterranean agitations and approaching eruptions of which no one could neglect for a moment without imprudence.” He predicted incalculable earthquakes and innumerable grave consequences from the streams of lava that were to pour down on neighboring countries. Even more clearly than Mirabeau, Napoleon understood the dynamism of the French Revolution, this immense release of energy, this gateway to ceaseless activity and boundless ambition. His personality was admirably suited to his time. In a period which exalted the individual and his opportunities, Napoleon, as Friedrich Nietzsche so clearly sensed, was an extreme individualist, for whom France and Europe, nation and mankind, were but instruments of his destiny.

The same quest for an efficient government that brought about the Revolution in 1789 helped Napoleon to power ten years later. The French longed for a strong man who would safeguard the main achievements of the Revolution in orderly security and stabilize the new frontiers and glorious conquests in peace. Of all the institutions of the young republic, the army alone possessed the prestige and the power to achieve this. Of its young generals, Buonaparte appeared the most promising. He did not disappoint the country’s expectations. A man of rare vitality and capacity for work, of penetrating intelligence and prodigious memory, he proved a great administrator and organizer, continuing the line of enlightened monarchs of the eighteenth century and surpassing them by far, the last and the greatest of them. Like them, he did not understand and had no use for nationalism and the new popular forces. Like them, he believed in the state, in direction from above, in efficiency and rational order. But unlike the greatest of them, he did regard himself less the first servant of the state than its master. The state was the vehicle and instrument of his personal destiny. His primary end was not the welfare of his subjects or the raison d’état of France and not, except for brief moments, the perpetuation and glory of his dynasty.

3 Kircheisen, pp. 13 and 17-18.
All these limited goals he accepted and from time to time promoted each one or all of them, but they did not satisfy or contain him. His ambitions knew no definite limits; his activities had no fixed and stable direction. He felt his will was strong enough to triumph over the nature of man and the nature of things alike. To him, the impossible was only "a phantom of the timid soul and the refuge of the coward." Despite his youthful Rousseauan nationalism, he was an eighteenth-century cosmopolitan for whom civilization was one and the world the stage; in other respects he anticipated the twentieth century. He set the earliest and greatest example in modern times for the potentialities of the cult of force that found so many adherents in the extreme movements of socialism and nationalism a hundred years after his death. The words of this eighteenth-century man of genius sound sometimes like pronouncements of our times: "There is only one secret for world leadership, namely, to be strong, because in strength there is neither error nor illusion: it is naked truth." "Succeed! I judge men only by the results of their acts." He was a dynamic force, for whom "the world is but an occasion to act dangerously."4 Though his daring had ultimately to fail, it built much that lasted.

Unlike the typical eighteenth-century man, Napoleon did not know moderation, nor could his temperament accommodate itself to peace. He did not believe in harmony but in mastery, not in compromise but in struggle and decision. In 1803, after the Treaty of Amiens, France had everything it could desire, but Napoleon was unwilling for it to become a great state among other states and for himself to be a king equal to other kings. He had to be the first of all, the emperor of the Occident, the successor to Charlemagne and to Caesar; soon his ambitions went beyond the legacy of Rome, to Byzantium and to Asia. His triumphs he owed to the disunity of his adversaries, to their hesitation and half-measures. But his hubris drove him on until he succeeded in arousing the peoples, in overcoming the jealousies and pettiness of the rulers, in uniting Europe—not under his leadership but against him. He was repeatedly offered favorable peace conditions that would have left France in possession of many of its conquests; he rejected them. His stake was everything; the alternative was nothing. He could not resign himself to the French nation-state of the nineteenth century. He did not belong to the age of nationalism.

The constitutional liberties for which 1789 and the nineteenth century strove meant little to Napoleon. He did not deny them; he denatured them. He paid lip service to universal suffrage and deprived the people of any effective vote. With supreme contempt, he drew up many meaningless constitutions and had them confirmed by plebiscite. The people had no share in the government of their affairs; their public spirit was not encouraged. Yet in his declarations, he always took care to emphasize his wish to "rattacher les grandes autorités de l'état à la masse de la nation, d'où dérive nécessairement toute autorité nationale." But he admitted, no doubt, that as "l'élus du peuple" he alone represented the majority of the nation. He praised democracy if it was democracy on his terms—"true" democracy. Napoleon’s effective coups d'état with their subsequent plebiscitarian endorsements did not strengthen French respect for constitutional legality. The order which he undoubtedy
brought to France was not the animated coherent working of creative national forces; these were cowed and dormant, deprived of all spontaneity; what remained of movement was directed from above by an administrative system that insured quick obedience but did not allow any room for discussion or free cooperation. All public and intellectual life was closely supervised; the formation of parties or associations was prohibited; and though Napoleon was personally not cruel and his regime was devoid of brutality and mass executions in the twentieth-century style, it created an atmosphere of enforced silence, of distrust and denunciation, of arbitrary arrests and insecurity.

Napoleon’s dictatorship differed from twentieth-century totalitarianism in another respect. In his contempt for public opinion, for idéologies and writers, he failed to know how to make use of them. He made little attempt to mold public opinion. He did not flood the country with newspapers and pamphlets, he did not spread popular reports of his great campaigns and victories, nor did he try to explain the virtues of his legislation. He distrusted even a controlled use of the printed word. The Revolutionary period had abounded in pamphlets and newspapers; in Paris, Napoleon allowed only nine papers to be published, which in the spring of 1803 had a combined circulation of less than twenty thousand copies, and one semiofficial newspaper in each department. As there was to be only one party in France and only one opinion, there seemed to be no need for diversified newspapers. But even the few that did appear had to be protected against “the spread of false news.” They were threatened with suppression if they published “articles contrary to the respect due to the social pact, to the sovereignty of the people, and to the glory of the [French] arms.” Even pamphlets praising the emperor and popularizing his soldiers were extremely rare. The number of printers was limited, too; they and the booksellers had to be licensed and were required to take an oath that they would not print or sell any publication which might conflict with “their duty to the emperor and the interests of the state.” No less close was the supervision over the theater and over literature. Both became “official”; as a result, they were conventional in style and content, with the sources of creative inventiveness drying up. While the armies of Napoleon carried French power to the furthermost limits of Europe, the French spirit was in danger of losing the leadership it had exercised for so long.

Similarly, Napoleon did not concern himself with promotion of elementary education or the education of women. His reforms confined themselves mainly to higher schools for the training of capable and loyal civil servants. “Public instruction,” declared Pierre Louis, Comte de Roederer, who was put in charge in 1802 of all affairs concerning it, “can and must be a very powerful machine in our political system. Through it the legislator will be able to re-create a national spirit and then to make use of it himself.” The con-

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5 Napoleon treated painters in a similar way. They were attached as officers to the armies of the First Consul. “Militarized artists, submitted to the strictest discipline, they had nothing to paint but glorious battle scenes—which caused them to be called ‘painters of victories’—and they could not paint them according to their inspiration; they could choose neither the day nor the hour nor the composition of the picture, and their talent was circumscribed by minute regulations worked out by offices which had little concern with art, even if one admits that it was not completely strange to them. They have left a considerable amount of work dispersed in various archives and museums and generally little known” (Louis VILLAT, La Révolution et l’empire (1789-1815) (“Clio, introduction aux études historiques,” No. 8) [Paris, 1936], II, 114).
cern of the Enlightenment for education had evaporated; what remained was paternal care of good and useful subjects. Napoleon centralized education, as he centralized the state. The decree of March 17, 1808 organized the “University,” the general corporation charged with the direction of the political and moral formation of French youth. Its bases were the teachings of the Catholic religion; loyalty to the emperor and the imperial monarchy, the depository of the happiness of the people, and to the Napoleonic dynasty, the preserver of the unity of France and of all the liberal ideas proclaimed by the constitutions; and obedience to teachers and parents. For Napoleon more and more only the official world existed, the armor of the state; for the nation and its intellectual life he had little use. He underestimated their importance, both in France and abroad.

In a speech to the senate, Napoleon said on July 9, 1810, “A new order of things now guides the universe.” This order, though rational in its outline and efficient in its application, broke upon the one obstacle which it did not take into account: the human element, the popular reluctance to accept the imposed form. Napoleon’s society was planned by a great strategist in the camp of a victorious army. Distrusting spontaneous manifestations of liberty, he regarded the order of the army and the discipline and élan of war as an antidote to social anarchy; he did not see that long wars in themselves threaten to produce anarchy and to destroy much of the substance on which every living order must be based. He tried to compensate the French with economic activity for the political immobility that he imposed.

Napoleon appealed to the ambitious self-love of the French that the success of the Revolutionary armies had fanned, to their feeling of superiority. He wished his rule to be “a dictatorship of persuasion based upon popularity.”6 To some, he promised to continue the gains and heroism of the Revolution; to others, he appeared as a conservative force. “So artfully was the system of Buonaparte contrived, that each of the numerous classes of Frenchmen found something in it congenial to his habits, his feeling, or his circumstances, providing only he was willing to sacrifice to it the essential part of his political principles. . . . To all these parties, Buonaparte held out the same hopes under the same conditions.—‘All these things will I give you, if you will kneel down and worship me!’ Shortly afterwards, he was enabled to place before them to whom the choice was submitted, the original temptation in its full extent—a display of the kingdoms of the earth, over which he offered to extend the empire of France, providing always he was himself acknowledged as the object of general obedience, and almost adoration.”7

The dynamism of Napoleon’s temperament did not allow him to formulate and follow a consistent foreign policy, conforming to the interests of the French state, as Cardinal Richelieu had done. His aspirations led him in too many directions. Everywhere he found England in his way, whether he tried to expand throughout Europe or to re-create the Mediterranean empire of the Romans that he, himself a Mediterranean, regarded as his legacy. From his earliest years, his glance had embraced distant lands and his plans mapped out roads for fu-

7 Sir Walter SCOTT, The life of Napoleon Buona-
ture adventure. When he started for Egypt in April 1798 as general-in-chief of the Army of the Orient, he carried with him a directive to "drive out the English from all their possessions in the Orient," to cut the isthmus of Suez and to take all necessary measures to assure the French Republic free and exclusive possession of the Red Sea. The daring march to the Pyramids and across the Sinai Desert was motivated not by the arbitrariness of a freebooter but by the logic of a great vision: to make Egypt the starting point, as it had been with Alexander and Caesar, for the conquest of Asia, for an advance toward India, for a decisive battle in the heart of the new British empire. Successful, Napoleon would have attained the triumph of vast land masses over sea power, the reopening and control of the ancient land routes to the East, the revival of the decayed civilizations and glories of the Levant and the Orient. This "mirage" of a renaissance of the lands long relegated to obscurity by the rise of oceanic sea power beckoned him on all his life. It was inextricably linked with his hostility to Britain, the mistress of the sea, and his jealousy of Russia, the empire of the East, for Napoleon himself vacillated between recreating the empire of the West—and protecting it and its Mediterranean civilization against the threats from the north and the east—and the limitless horizons of the earth. In the twenty years of his career he had to confine himself to uniting Europe; he was stopped at the Channel and on the snow fields of Russia from going beyond. But at the beginning of the age of nationalism stands its denial in Napoleon's universal empire, a vision that was taken up again only at the end of the age by Lenin and Hitler.

When Napoleon in 1804 assumed the title of "Emperor of the French," many regarded this step as a betrayal of the Revolution. The Revolutionary hero seemed dead, buried under glittering uniforms and high-sounding titles, church incense and court ceremonial. Beethoven tore up the dedication of his Third symphony to General Buonaparte and replaced his name by the lament, "To the memory of a great man." Stendhal, watching the coronation ceremonies in Paris, looked with disgust at the emperor as a new Caesar and called his accommodation with the pope "an alliance of all the charlatans." He "rinsed out the bad taste" in his mouth by reading Victor Alfieri, the revolutionary nationalist of eighteenth-century Italy. In reality, Napoleon never ceased to incarnate truly one aspect of the French Revolution: its universalism and its quest for efficient government. To other aspects like nationalism and liberalism he often paid lip service, but he found little use for them in his actions. His own nature drove him to disregard or misinterpret the forces of liberty long before he became emperor. He did not revive the title of king, because it seemed to imply an abdication of popular sovereignty, while the title "Emperor" flattered the nation and its desire for glory without alarming it unduly. It preserved the feeling that national sovereignty was unimpaired—"My policy consists in ruling men according to the rule of the great majority. In this way I believe one recognizes the sovereignty of the people"—and did not recall the

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8 Matthew JOSEPHSON, Stendhal (Garden City, N.Y., 1946), p. 122.

9 That he became one, while the "great leaders" of the twentieth century, Hitler and Stalin, did not, was due to the different circumstances of the two periods. In Napoleon's time nationalism had not yet sufficiently consolidated nations, nor was it possible to elaborate a doctrine for the masses or forge a mass party, so that a hereditary dynasty seemed the only guarantee of continuity.

10 Kircheisen, p. 234.
struggle with the royal government for liberty.

The new title did not strike the French as strange or as incompatible with republican achievements. The same law that proclaimed Napoleon emperor charged him with the government of the French Republic. The term "empire" had been widely used in eighteenth-century France and by French republicans to connote a vast and prosperous land with a great future—as it had been by American patriots for the thirteen colonies and later for the young and growing United States. It was in no way contrary to liberty and it was full of the promise of human happiness. Napoleon, however, thought less of this modern meaning of the word than of its ancient and hallowed significance, the memory of the Roman Empire as the guarantor of peace and justice in a universal world order. When he married Marie Louise, the daughter of the last Holy Roman Emperor, this imperial succession meant as much to him as the practical advantages of an alliance with Austria and as the fact that the mother of his son was the niece of the last queen of France. In his renovation of the empire of the West, he naturally recalled Charlemagne, who like him had rebuilt the Roman Empire in the West and, as ruler of the Franks, had united Italy and Germany. Soon after Charlemagne the Western empire had disintegrated. Napoleon hoped to revive its greatness and force and to bring to a close the long struggle between French and Germans for its heritage. Like Charlemagne, he wished to found his empire in collaboration with the Roman church but without allowing it to be weakened by papal claims. No longer should the church have the power it possessed in the middle ages to war with the emperor for supremacy. The secular ruler should hold undisputed sway.

An eighteenth-century agnostic, Napoleon was willing to use the church to support order and morality among his subjects and to solidify his reign. He regarded it as an institution of his empire and the pope as an imperial official. "Paris was to be the metropolis of Christendom, the center and guide of the religious as well as of the political world." To the Ecclesiastical Committee he declared on March 16, 1811: "The present epoch carries us back to the time of Charlemagne. All the kingdoms, principalities, and duchies which formed themselves out of the debris of the empire have been rejuvenated under our laws. The church of my empire is the church of the Occident and of almost the whole of Christendom." He announced the convocation of a Council of the Occident in order that "the church of my empire be one in its discipline, as it is in its faith." When he annexed the Papal States on May 17, 1809, he did so on the strength of the theory that the secular domain of the pope had been a fief of Charlemagne, "Empereur des Français et notre auguste prédécesseur," and that the true sovereignty remained with the donor and his heirs, who could revoke or modify the gift. The expenses of the papal office were charged to the imperial budget, and the autonomy of the Gallican church of 1682 was extended to the church in the whole empire.

In 1811 this empire, with its frontiers on the Elbe, the Ebro, and the Adriatic Sea, was practically coextensive with that of Charlemagne. French prefects administered its affairs in Rome and Florence, Genoa and Turin, Antwerp and The Hague, Hamburg and Mainz, Trier and Cologne, Barcelona and Saragossa.

\[\text{Ibid., p. 180.}\]
In addition, it included the Illyrian provinces on the Adriatic coast, and the Kingdom of Italy with Milan as its capital. Around this mighty nucleus, there was an outer circle of closely controlled vassal states, Spain and Naples in the south, the Confederation of the Rhine, the Helvetic Confederation, and the Duchy of Warsaw in the east. By its hold on the Vistula and on the Ionian Islands, Napoleon's empire went far beyond that of Charlemagne, stretching out in the direction of the Orient, toward the reunion of Byzantium with Rome.

This empire of the West had two capitals, Paris and Rome, which on February 17, 1810 was proclaimed "the second city of the empire." The emperors, after their coronation in Notre Dame in Paris, were to be crowned once more before the tenth year of their reign in Saint Peter's. The pope was invited to reside where he pleased but preferably in Paris or Rome. The yet unborn heir to the throne received in 1810 the title "King of Rome," which all future heirs were to bear, an appellation recalling that of the uncrowned Holy Roman Emperors and of what infinitely greater majesty and promise than the title "Prince of Wales" borne by the heirs to the disputed realm of the sea! With the magnificence of the twentieth-century despots Napoleon set out to monumentalize his two capitals as centers of triumphant empire. An imperial palace was planned for the Capitol in Rome, and excavations were begun to lay bare the forums of antiquity, the focuses of ancient world order.

Napoleonic rule imposed upon the provinces and satellites of his empire new concepts and vitalized them with new life. Much of it quickly vanished after his fall, but something remained of his invigorating efficiency and ended many outworn traditions and institutions. Wherever Napoleon went, he brought with him rational reforms and administrative progress. When he started for Egypt, the decree of the Directory of April 13, 1798 charged him in Article IV "to improve by all means at his disposal the fate of the natives." He took with him a great number of carefully chosen scholars and scientists in all fields, and with their help he founded on August 22, 1798 the Institut d'Égypte, of which Gaspard Monge became the first president. Scientific research into the antiquity, the geography, the fauna and flora, and the present state of Egypt was eagerly promoted, to go hand in hand with the spread of enlightenment among its people. On October 2, 1798 the first issue of a literary and philosophical journal, Décades égyptiennes, appeared. The French hoped that through modernization Egypt would become the cradle of the regeneration of Islam and that civilization, science, and industry would return to the country that had once been their center. As this renascence developed under French inspiration, a close tie between France and the Middle East was to result: the spread of enlightenment would entail a growth of French influence.

Though Napoleon's rule in Egypt was short-lived, his hopes were not all disappointed. It is true that his progressive reforms did not reach the people and did not influence their lives. But modern Egyptology owes its origin to the work of his scholars and found its initial expression in the famous Description de l'Égypte, which in its nine volumes of text and twelve volumes of plates made the first survey of the antiquities, the natural resources, and the modern society of the land of the Nile. French civilization and language remained predomi-
nant in Egypt in the tiny educated upper class for well over a century; and when a few years after Napoleon’s expedition the vigorous and ruthless Albanian soldier, Mohammed Ali, laid the foundation of the first modern Islamic state in Egypt, he did it partly under the inspiration of the legacy Napoleon’s administration left in the ancient land.12

More immediately far-reaching were the effects of Napoleon’s administration in the Belgian departments that the Convention had incorporated into France. Under the Directory they had merely felt bewildered and oppressed; under Napoleon they were infused with fresh energy and benefited from the new social order created by the Revolution. The ties with the traditional past of estates and provinces, castes and guilds, privileges and rights, still so potent in 1792, were definitely broken. When Napoleon’s domination ended, no return to 1792 was any longer possible. His rule had not aroused a Belgian nationalism, for whatever national feeling had existed had been closely connected with the old regime and provincial autonomy, which were now no more than a distant memory. Napoleon succeeded only in preparing the soil for a future growth of a new Belgian nationalism. Meanwhile, “if one did not feel one’s self French, one did not feel one’s self Belgian either. One was satisfied to live by making the best of one’s opportunities without considering them as good in themselves. Instead of a true national sentiment, there were only vague aspirations toward a better future which no one could define.”13

The Belgians recognized the good qualities of the new administration, its useful innovations, and the security it afforded to the rising spirit of enterprise and individual advancement; but they suffered from a lack of civil liberties, and they felt the French administrators to be aliens. Napoleon carried out the program of enlightened absolutism that Joseph II had tried to implant in Belgium, and its reforms, rejected twenty years before, were now accepted. But the measures of frenchification of instruction and administration and the conflict with the Catholic church alienated many Belgians. Religious publications like the Jerusalems herstelling (1811) by the priest Stichelbaut kept love of the mother-tongue and devotion to the church alive. When the French occupation ended with the allied victories in the spring of 1814, the Belgians did not aid the French, nor did they, like the Dutch, rise against them. A return to the old regime was unacceptable to the younger generation grown up during the last twenty years; most of the people did not wish to abandon the achievements of the Napoleonic era; but the Belgians had no national program of their own, for Napoleon’s regime nowhere directly encouraged the growth of spontaneous group activity and of national sentiment, though indirectly it prepared for it.

Napoleon was ready to use national aspirations as far as they seemed to fit into his system, without having any sincere desire to satisfy them. He never thought seriously of an independent Poland or an independent Italy, though from time to time he gave vague encouragement to those who believed in them. For him nations had no reality of their own. He created and dissolved new states incessantly and shifted frontiers and rulers restlessly. Nor did he encounter opposition from


13 H. Pirenne, Histoire de Belgique (Brussels, 1926), VI, 141.
nationalism in the beginning. The people dissatisfied with his rule were less moved by national sentiments than by dislike of alien troops who stayed on and lived off the land and in many cases behaved without tact or restraint. They were motivated much more by loyalty to religion or to traditional ways of life than by nationalism. Only toward the end of his reign did Napoleon succeed, against his will and intention, in arousing nationalism in some of the people subject to or threatened by his rule. Thus indirectly and unwittingly Napoleon became a midwife to the birth of the age of nationalism on the continent of Europe.

At the end of 1811 Marshal Davout, the commanding officer in Hamburg, warned Napoleon of the mounting national sentiment in Germany and of the dangers to French rule that this growth of German nationalism involved. Napoleon rejected the warning; he did not believe in the possibility of nationalism and in his rebuke pointed to the peaceful character of the German people. Germany seemed to him quiescent and obedient. "If there were a movement in Germany, it would ultimately be for us and against the small princes."¹⁴ Whatever understanding of nationalism there was in Napoleon's mind applied to Italy. He was the first to create an Italian republic and later a kingdom of Italy and thus to give a powerful impetus to the slowly awakening demands for Italian unity and nationhood. Later on, he was to say that he had planned eventually "to create a single state out of this great peninsula." Yet while he had the power, he divided Italy up arbitrarily and repeatedly, according to what he believed were the momentary interests of his empire and his dynasty. On behalf of these interests, he might, if his empire had survived, have crowned a second son king of Italy and united the country around his throne.¹⁵

Only when all hopes for empire and dynasty had vanished and Napoleon himself was a captive on St. Helena did he begin to build up consistently a legend about his intentions and plans to promote the liberty of nations and the happiness of Europe. This legend deeply influenced the thought of following generations and prepared the way for a brief rebirth of empire and dynasty. In a famous passage, he espoused simultaneously the cause of national unity for the four great continental peoples, the French, the Spanish, the Italians, and the Germans, and the cause of a united Europe where the same views and interests, laws and principles, would prevail throughout the continent. Even then, his words betrayed the vagueness of his thinking on these issues. His decisions were dictated by changing strategic needs. Against England and Russia, Napoleon wished at times to consolidate France, Spain, and Italy into a compact Latin bloc that would be an impregnable barrier against "all the nations of the north." He asked himself why no German prince had used

¹⁴ Correspondance, XXIII, 45 (No. 18,300, Dec. 2, 1811).

¹⁵ Kirch: Eisen, p. 236. On Napoleon's treatment of Italian patriotism see Correspondance, II, 63 (No. 1,099, Oct. 17, 1796), 137 (No. 1,258, Dec. 10, 1796), 223–24 (No. 1,340, Jan. 1, 1797), and 483 (No. 1,724, Apr. 12, 1797); III, 153 (No. 1,960, June 29, 1797) and 235 (No. 2,013, Aug. 16, 1797): "Les îles de Corfou, de Zante et de Céphalonie sont plus intéressantes pour nous que toute l'Italie ensemble. Je crois que si nous étions obligés d'opter, il vaudrait mieux rétablir l'Italie à l'Empereur et garder les quatre îles, qui sont une source de richesse et de prospérité pour notre commerce. L'Empire des Turcs s'écroule tous les jours; la possession de ces îles nous mettra à même de le soutenir autant que cela sera possible, ou d'en prendre notre part"; XXVII, 11–12. (No. 21,063, Jan. 4, 1814); and XXXII, 386 (reported by Dr. Francesco Antommarchi as told to him on Jan. 26, 1821).
the German demand for unity to his own profit. "Certainly, if heaven had willed that I be born a German prince, I would infallibly have governed thirty million united Germans; and from what I think I know of them, I believe that, once they had elected and proclaimed me, they would never have abandoned me, and I would not be here now."

Napoleon believed that he might have led a willing and obedient German nation to dominion over Europe. Little in these words betrays any attachment to France or to the happiness of peoples. But at the same time he sounded a different note: "Le premier souverain qui, au milieu de la premiere grande mêlée, embrassera de bonne foi la cause des peuples, se trouvera à la tete de toute l'Europe et pourra tenter tout ce qu'il voudra." Napoleon III certainly remembered these words. Yet, even provided that the interests of the various nations and of the whole of Europe did not conflict, the leader of the peoples and of the whole continent might have discovered that it was difficult under any circumstances to attempt whatever he desired. The cult of force and of limitless empire dominated Napoleon's mind to the last: his dream did not change on St. Helena. With greater sincerity he told Benjamin Constant a few months before he had to leave France: "I wished for the empire of the world, and to insure it unlimited power was necessary to me. To govern France alone, a constitution may be better." The age of nationalism rejected the emperor of the world and demanded constitutions.

Concretely, Napoleon's European union, his Continental System, was a weapon in his struggle with England. "Let us be masters of the Channel for only six hours, and we shall be masters of the world." In this struggle, he claimed to represent the interests of mankind and to defend the liberties of all peoples. These peoples, however, did not agree: they feared Napoleon and the French much more than the English. The English employed the advantages of commerce and inspired jealousy; Napoleon used the means of war and imposed tyranny. Napoleon's liberal opponent, Benjamin Constant, in his De l'esprit de conquête et de l'usurpation dans leurs rapports avec la civilisation européenne (1813) saw in war the instrument of the past, in commerce that of enlightened civilization.

War and commerce are only two different means of arriving at the same goal—the possession of what one desires. Commerce is an attempt to receive by agreement what one no longer hopes to conquer by force. A man who would always be the strongest, would never think of commerce. It is experience which, in demonstrating to him that war—this is to say, the employment of his force against that of another—is exposed to various resistances and checks, leads him to have recourse to commerce—that is to say, to a more pleasant and certain way of compelling the interests of others to consent to what accommodates his own interest. . . Carthage, fighting with Rome in ancient times, had to succumb; it had the force of circumstances against it. But if the fight between Rome and Carthage were taking place today, Carthage would have the universe on its side. Elle aurait pour alliés les mœurs actuelles et le génie du monde.

Napoleon showed some understanding of English liberty, but he rejected the possibility of its application in France.

16 Correspondance, XXXII, 394–6; Eng. trans. in Emmanuel, Comte de Las Cases, Mémoirs of the life, exile and conversations of the Emperor Napoleon (4 vols.; New York, 1890), IV, 104–8.


18 Henri Benjamin Constant, De l'esprit de conquête... (Paris, 1918), pp. 12 and 14, chap. ii, "Du caractère des nations modernes relativement à la guerre."

19 Kircheisen, p. 238. Like Frederick II of Prussia, Napoleon permitted religious discussions
In the case of a nation like the English where everything is influenced by public opinion, even the actions of the Minister of State and the resolutions of Parliament, it will be easily understood that the press enjoys unlimited freedom. Our constitutions, on the other hand, do not require the interference of the people in state affairs. If the people were not satisfied with this, the existing organization would have to be completely altered; but it has been proved that such a force of public opinion produces nothing but confusion and excitements, so that a strict surveillance of the press would have to be set up.

On St. Helena, Napoleon expressed himself more enthusiastically about liberty and the English model. Aware of the contradiction between his words and his acts, he pointed out:

There is no comparison between my situation and that of the English government. England is able to work on a soil which extends to the very bowels of the earth; while I could labor only on sandy surface. England reigns over an established order of things; while I had to take upon myself the great charge, the immense difficulty, of conciliating and establishing. I purified the revolution, in spite of hostile factions. I combined together all the scattered benefits that could be preserved; but I was obliged to protect them with a nervous arm against the attacks of all parties; and in this situation it may truly be said that the public interest, the state, was myself.

While Napoleon rejected liberty, he offered equality. "I have always been of the opinion that sovereignty lay in the people. The imperial government was a kind of republic. Called to the head of it by the voice of the nation, my maxim was 'La carrière ouverte aux talents' without distinction of birth or fortune." but no political opposition. "Great freedom must be allowed in writings on religious questions, so that the publication of useful truths may not be strangled under the cloak of offense to religion. However, censorship will be inflexible in the case of documents directed against the state" (ibid., p. 243). He had no racial prejudice. Repeatedly he suggested as the best way of establishing peace and civilization in the colonies the encouragement of intermarriage between whites and blacks. To that end he proposed to authorize polygamy, provided that every man took wives of different colors, so that the children of each, brought up under the same roof and upon the same footing, would from their infancy learn to consider themselves as equal and in the ties of relationship forget difference of color. On St. Helena he regretted the expedition to Santo Domingo. "I ought to have treated with the black chieftains; I ought to have appointed Negroes as officers in their regiments, and made Toussaint l'Ouverture viceroy." Not only did he give equality to the Jews, but he welcomed their influx into France. In his opinion they supplied good soldiers for the French army, and great wealth was brought to France through them. He was convinced that if his empire had lasted, many more Jews would have immigrated to France, for all the Jews would gradually have come to settle in a country where equality of laws was assured to them and where all honors stood open to them. What Napoleon demanded was loyal and obedient subjects, useful to the state; as long as they were that, he did not inquire into their religion, race, or nationality.

This emphasis on equality made Na-
Napoleon plead strongly for military conscription. "An emperor puts his confidence in national soldiers, not in mercenaries." In a talk with an Englishman who objected to conscription, Napoleon maintained that universal military service wounded the pride of the English oligarchy because it fell upon all ranks. "Oh, how shocking that a gentleman's son should be obliged to defend his country, just as if he were one of the canaille! That he should be expected to expose his body, or put himself on the level with the vile plebeian! Yet God made all men alike." Nevertheless, it is interesting to note that even under Napoleon conscription was far from all-inclusive. As in the days of the Convention or the Directory, only unmarried young men served, and the wealthy were allowed to buy substitutes; the heaviest burden fell not upon France but upon the newly acquired provinces and vassal states. Yet conscription was very unpopular. In 1811 the number of evaders was estimated at one hundred and sixty thousand for France, and in formulating the appeal for 1813 the emperor himself expected one hundred thousand more. Bribery, self-mutilation, and marriages between very young men and very old women to evade service were not rare. When the Grand Army crossed the borders of Russia in 1812, Frenchmen formed less than half its numbers. The wars of Napoleon had ceased to be national wars; it was only in defense of French territory in 1814 and 1815 that something like the original national enthusiasm appeared.25

25 O'Meara, II, 225. See also Las Cases, IV, 145.

26 How much conscription was resented may be seen from the violent diatribe against "la loi homicide" in F.-A.-R., vicomte de Chateaubriand's "De Buonaparte et des Bourbons" (Mar. 30, 1814), Oeuvres complètes (Paris, 1828), XXIV, 20-24; and in Edmond Gérard's journal for March 1814, quoted in H. F. Stewart and Paul Desjardins, Nationalism was at a low ebb in France when Napoleon returned from Russia. The nation was tired of wars and tired of glory. Napoleon fought on throughout 1813 with indefatigable valor on German battlefields. But even his retreat to the Rhine and his appeals to the memories of 1793 could not rekindle the burnt-out flame. The people had been deprived of initiative and activity, their true desires stifled, for too long. Glory had seduced many in whom the new liberty of 1789 had not yet taken root. But glory depended on success; when fortune deserted Napoleon, it was quickly forgotten in the bitter disappointment of the moment that he had carried the French banners to Madrid and Rome, to Berlin and Vienna; he was now held responsible for misfortune and defeat:

Eh bien! dans tous ces jours d'abaissement, de peine,
Pour tous ces outrages sans nom,
Je n'ai jamais chargé qu'un être de ma haine ...
Sois maudit, ô Napoléon!
Ô Corse à cheveux plats! ...

The provisional government that Talleyrand formed on April 1, 1814 reminded the French people three days later:

To end civil discord, you chose as your head a man who appeared on the world stage with the marks of greatness on him. You put all your hopes in him; those hopes have been betrayed; on the ruins of anarchy, he founded nothing but despotism. He should at least, out of gratitude, have become a Frenchman with you. That he has never been.... He knew not how to rule, neither in the national interest, nor in the interest of his despotism. He destroyed whatever he wished to create, and recreated whatever he wished to destroy. He believed only in force; today he is overthrown by force: just retribution for his insensate ambition.
Napoleon had wished to create an empire out of all proportion; it was time, many Frenchmen felt, that the nation recognized its limits and regained its proper measure. Only on such foundations could true grandeur for France be founded.\(^27\)

A young Frenchwoman who had lived through the Revolution and the Empire observed in 1813: "All the peoples have found a patriotic energy to repel us, why did we lack it? What is the fatherland, if not love of long-standing habits, of family, of country and of quiet happiness? Alas! France at present is nothing more than a garrison where discipline and boredom rule. We will defend this garrison out of obedience, but the inhabitants will not identify themselves with the quarrel, and the conquest of France is but a military affair, threatening only the honor of the army."\(^28\) Pierre Jean de Béranger, who felt the pulse of the city on March 31, 1814, the day when the victorious allies entered Paris, was convinced:\(^29\)

If the emperor had been able to read all their hearts, he would have doubtless recognized one of his greatest mistakes, one which the nature of his genius caused him to make. He had gagged the people; he had taken from them all free intervention in their own affairs and thus obliterated those principles that our Revolution had inculcated in us. From this resulted a deep torpor of the sentiments which are most natural to us. For a long time his success took the place of patriotism for us; but, as he had absorbed the whole nation within him, the whole nation fell with him. And, in our fall, we did not know, in the face of our enemies, how to be anything more than he had made us.

There still survived republican patriots who had fallen into disfavor with Napoleon because of their outspoken criticism. One of them was Lazare Carnot, who had voted against the establishment of a hereditary monarchy by Napoleon. In his speech on that occasion he emphasized that he could not consent to regard liberty, a good so superior to all others and without which the others were nothing, as but an illusion. "My heart tells me that liberty is possible, that a free regime is easy to maintain and that it is more stable than any arbitrary government." In spite of his refusal to sanction the destruction of liberty, he repeated that he was always ready to sacrifice his dearest affections to the interests of the fatherland.\(^30\) The disaster of 1813 called him from retirement to the defense of his country. He offered Napoleon his services, was appointed commander of the garrison of Antwerp, and proved there "a faithful and incorruptible soldier." When Louis XVIII became king of France, Carnot addressed a memorandum to him in July 1814, in which he emphasized the need of nationalism to unite the French people. "Only a noble and strong passion can do it, and this passion can only be love of the fatherland. One must therefore insure its birth, one must create a national spirit; that is what we lack, and what we lack to such a degree that we can hardly conceive of it, so that scarcely none of us understands how one can sac-

\(^27\) STEWART and DESJARDINS, pp. 130 and 131.

\(^28\) Aimée de COIGNY, Mémoires, ed. Étienne LAMY (Paris, 1902), p. 229. See also Mme de STAEL, Considerations sur la Révolution française, Part IV, chap. xix.

\(^29\) Pierre Jean de Béranger, Ma biographie (3d ed.; Paris, 1859), p. 162. See also the Mémoires de la Comtesse de Boigne (Adèle d'Osmont), ed. Marquise d'Osmont (Paris, 1921), I, 292: "It was no longer a public matter—one had no personal connection with it, and one was not allowed to inquire about it; the emperor had made such an effort to make it his affair and not ours, that one had finally taken him at his word. And, whatever people may have been saying about him for the last few years, in 1814 everybody, including his army and officials, was so tired that they asked for nothing but to be relieved from an effort that had ceased to be directed by a wise and reasonable will."

\(^30\) Huntley DUPRE, Lazare Carnot, republican patriot (Oxford, Ohio, 1940), p. 264.
rifice one's personal interest to the general interest, and forget oneself for the salvation and glory of one's country."

The French, Carnot went on to say, would hardly believe in the possibilities of patriotism if they had not seen its development in England, where all private fortunes were tied up with the common good and where, therefore, everyone was strongly interested in the general welfare. France must develop, he believed, a similar patriotism, though its focus would be different. "England makes it a point of honor to regard herself as the center of great maritime enterprises which unite all nations; France must make it hers to profit from the gifts with which nature has prodigiously endowed her." He demanded a loving attachment to French soil and its cultivation without any wish for rivalry with the British in foreign trade, supremacy in which was assured to the latter for a very long time by geographic position and the balance of power in Europe. Such a love of the fatherland, Carnot believed, would unite the various national forces in a common sentiment and task and preserve them from adventures and conquest.31

At the same time, two of the most influential thinkers of the coming generation, Claude-Henri Saint-Simon, the great visionary of early socialism, and Augustin Thierry, his disciple and the future historian, published in October 1814 De la réorganisation de la société européenne, in which they regarded an Anglo-French alliance as desirable but impossible. Half a year later, in their Opinion sur les mesures à prendre contre la coalition de 1815, they proposed to found a new Europe on an alliance between the two nations. Such co-operation, they thought, was demanded by interest and necessity alike; and though the authors foresaw that the French would at present reject it, they were convinced that the time would come when such a union would put an end to French turmoil and ills. The two nations were in one respect complementary: Britain had at its disposal accumulated trade capital, France a fertile soil. More important was their community of political ideas. Britain had behind it one hundred and thirty years of the parliamentary government upon which the French were now embarking; the constitutional party in France would find in the British nation support against both the defenders of despotism and those of an extravagant liberty. France was the only nation on the continent of Europe, all the other states were only governments; between France and Britain nation could speak to nation and influence the governments to act according to the national will.

Therefore, the two authors demanded that the French nation, which Napoleon had convoked for June 1, 1815 to swear fidelity to the constitution on the Champ de Mai, reviving for that purpose the old name of the Frankish assembly, declare: "That the English people, by the conformity of our institutions with its own, by that affinity of principles and that community of social interest which are the strongest ties between men, is henceforward our natural ally; that the will of the French nation, that the interest of England and France, the interest of the whole of Europe, demand that this union be rendered more intimate, stronger and more regular by an accord between the governments; and that, therefore, the Assembly order the government that it was to create to conclude an alliance with the British government." Saint-Simon

and Thierry insisted that the making of the constitution of the French state should be adjourned until the war crisis of 1815 was averted, so that the nation could deliberate freely.\textsuperscript{32}

Their hopes were not realized. The Assembly of the Champ de Mai adopted the Acte additionnel which Napoleon proposed to meet the demands for liberal reforms after his return from Elba. It was accepted without enthusiasm and without confidence: Napoleon did not like concessions so contrary to his personality and temperament, the people found them insufficient to safeguard liberty against the return of despotism. But whatever their feeling toward Napoleon, most Frenchmen were willing to fight. They resented the returning Bourbons and émigrés even more than they did Napoleon, they were eager to preserve the social gains of the Revolution, and they were bitter at the humiliation of France by the invading armies. For the first time genuine national feeling seemed to rally around Napoleon. It was too late. Waterloo brought the Bourbons back, and though the peace terms were generous and mild and France was preserved within its territorial frontiers of 1791, the fall from towering heights of glory and power had been too steep not to leave its mark upon French national pride. Waterloo was regarded as an English victory, the outcome of the long wars of the Revolution as a British triumph; emotionally, French nationalism was to be directed for many years against England. Their common ideal of liberty did not, as Saint-Simon and Thierry had hoped, unite the two nations in the face of a Europe in which nationalism had either not yet awakened the peoples or had taken a definite turn away from the conception of a free society based upon rational law and rights of citizens to a romantic longing for originality and uniqueness and close communal ties based upon the call of the blood and the lure of the past.

Many Frenchmen, after having conquered and occupied foreign lands and dismembered states, remained deeply resentful for a long time of the peace treaty of 1815, which treated them much less harshly than they had treated others. A legendary interpretation of Napoleon revived his cult in France for a short while, and Jacobin fanaticism, with its exaltation of the common weal and engineering of the human soul, still has not died out in France. Nevertheless, in France the liberalism of 1789 has proved the most lasting heritage of all. It was only outside France that the essential Napoleonic traits were revived and then only after the nineteenth century, the age of the bourgeoisie and of nationalism, had ended in the German “spirit of 1914" and in Lenin’s revolution, both opposed to the principles of 1789.

Napoleon’s regime foreshadowed the twentieth-century totalitarians who “regarded weakness as ignoble, laws as superfluous subtleties, and despised parliamentary forms for their allegedly unbearable slowness. They preferred rapid and trenchant decisions as in war and thought unanimity of opinion as essential as in an army. Opposition they regarded as disorder, critical reasoning as revolt, the courts as military tribunals, the juges as soldiers who must execute the orders of authority, those who were suspect or accused as if they were enemies and convicted criminals, and the judgments of the courts as battles in the state of war into which they had transformed government.”\textsuperscript{33} Like Napoleon, they had little

\textsuperscript{32} Stewart and Desjardins, pp. 160–65.

\textsuperscript{33} Slightly paraphrased from Constant, \textit{De l’esprit de conquête}, p. 25.
respect for the nature of man and of things and arrogantly and forcefully intended to regiment the human soul. Systematic imposition of a common pattern promised to facilitate government and to strengthen authority. Men thus reduced to similarity and equality afforded ready material for the engineering feats the hubris of the leaders planned. In France, however, the imprescriptible rights of the Declaration of Rights of Man and the Citizen had taken too deep root to allow the sacrifices of the human personality to the collectivities which arose in the age of nationalism.

The nineteenth century was in the main a period of the growth of constitutional liberties and commercial intercourse. Toward its end, however, Nietzsche predicted the coming of a new and more "virile" age. "We owe it to Napoleon," he wrote, "that several warlike centuries, which have not had their like in past history, may now follow one another—in short, that we have entered upon the classical age of war, war at the same time scientific and popular." Nietzsche's expectation of "several warlike centuries" may be wrong; but he forecast correctly the character of the new era that began in August 1914 and November 1917, in which individual national life no longer formed the center of concern. "Inescapably, hesitatingly, terrible like fate, the great task and question approaches: how should the earth as a whole be administered? And to what end should man as a whole—no longer a people or a race—be raised and bred?"

To that end, Napoleon, as Nietzsche said, "wanted one Europe, which was to be the mistress of the world." 34

Napoleon appeared as a "violent anachronism" in the age of nationalism; at its beginning, for the protection of their liberty, tranquillity, and diversity, the other peoples united against him and overthrew his new order of conquest and uniformity. Their resistance sealed his fate. In the first war of nationalities he perished. But his violence aroused dark passions hostile to the Enlightenment, which had formed the background of his own ideas. Napoleon was still a rational classicist whom Goethe and Hegel greeted as an embodiment of the world spirit, but the superman in him broke the bounds of the human and the humane. Romantically, a man alone against the world, he rose above the common law in the certainty of his historical mission. What would happen if a whole people followed his lead and—without the safeguards of respect for reason and the essential oneness of men of all classes and nations—also rose above the common law, ready to stand alone against the world, and bear this burden in equal certainty of historical mission?

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34 Friedrich W. Nietzsche, The will to power, trans. A. M. Ludovici (New York, 1924), Book IV, "On breeding: the masters of the world," No. 951; The joyful wisdom, Book V, "We fearless ones," No. 362; and Genealogy of morals, first essay, "Good and evil, good and bad," No. 16.