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Eulogy of a Death

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EULOGY OF A DEATH

What man is without fault, and what king without weakness?
VOLTAIRE

PARIS

AVAILABLE AT ALL NOVELTY RETAILERS ¹

1821

¹ Merchants of the era who specialized in selling new novels, articles and fabrics.

Translators' Introduction

No official eulogy was written for Napoleon in 1821, the year of his death. More than five years after he was put in exile on Saint Helena in 1815, Napoleon was still a sore subject in the French political scene. An official eulogy glorifying the former emperor simply would have been too controversial. Nevertheless, countless French citizens still saw Napoleon as the nation's hero, the man who breathed life into a land suffocated by the turmoil of the revolution.

This particular eulogy is one of many unofficial works that paid homage to Napoleon following his death. The author, who remains anonymous, overflows with pride for the French nation and nostalgia for an unforgettable era. As it retells Napoleon's life story, the eulogy celebrates his achievements while acknowledging his faults. It simultaneously mythologizes and humanizes Napoleon, comparing him to Alexander the Great and yet revealing that at heart, Napoleon was a man of the people.

Though the French government refused to admit it at the time, the author of the eulogy was aware that Napoleon Bonaparte would live on as an unforgettable historical legend.

The son of victory is no more!!!... A rock as old as the world, on whose sides tumultuous waves from a foamy sea come crashing, houses his remains. Will France, admirer of the Great Man, be deprived of those precious remnants of a hero who restored her, who embellished her, who rebuilt her altars and made her name respectable? Is the shadow alone of the coffin that contains them being a scarecrow for those who provoked the arm of the conqueror of Marengo²? Is it becoming an object of deserved reproach for all who deserted his cause in order to preserve titles or riches that they had held thanks to him? This religious encasing would remind them too much of their ingratitude and their baseness.

If there is no monument erected for the great man--since it is forbidden for us to pay homage to the hero of yore who inspires and seems still to command the admiration and pride of the nation that saw his birth. Let him whose sword placed that nation at the head of Europe remain in our thoughts nonetheless. Circumstances and laws can forbid us from showing the public signs of worship that we always like to show for valiance. The noble impulses of French hearts can be suppressed and contained, but it is in vain that any man would try to stop the thought of this man. The more one tries to repress it, the more it comes to recall the great deeds, and even the mistakes of an unhappy hero, that capricious victory eluded on only one day.

Let us analyze the life of the one who in exile sometimes cried over an ungrateful homeland that the enemy wants to take away from him, of one whose last breath was for the brave ones immortalized by his military genius.

The hero showed early on what he would one day become. Still young he was called by his destiny as a commander of men. What men? The greatest mass was demoralized and proceeding in the fields of victory, less out of a sentiment of honor than out of a mind to steal. At his dawn, the hero presented himself, and at his appearance the demoralized soldier obeys the discipline hitherto neglected. His rags fall, his existence is affirmed; he is reclothed, his wavering courage is fixed and contained under a banner that he respects and loves. Soon he follows with pride the steps of the hero in whom he put his confidence. Like him, he braves the greatest perils, crosses the remotest expanses. He braves exhaustion. Everything in his path falls because of the power of his well-directed valor. This vagabond soldier becomes in time a formidable hero, like his general whose armies and their weapons already resound throughout Europe.

Ancient Italy folded under the yoke of the new Alexander³. The capital of his fatherland received trophies, sure proof of his first successes. Our oldest captains saw without envy the birth of a fearsome warrior among them, and it pleased them to show him justice. It is in their midst, it is at their learned school, in the dangerous art of war that his genius shows itself, grows and becomes such that it soon places the young and impetuous conqueror above his masters who admire in him the hope, the support, the regenerator of France.

When all the gazes are fixed upon the general who is barely twenty-five, when the fame comes to trouble, by the noise of his exploits, the shameful sleep of a government without energy, envy then wants to obscure his dawning glory. The hero is called back, and because of his refusal to cease to be useful to his country, he is taken away from the victorious battlefields

² T.R. Battle of Marengo – A decisive French victory against the forces of Austria. The battle took place in Italy on June 14, 1800

³ T.R. Alexander the Great – Macedonian King who, as a youth, conquered much of Europe and the Persian Empire in the 4th century BC.

of Italy where the laurels were growing fast under his steps. We send him to a land of fire, we banish him to the burning sands of the Nile. Only knowing how to follow orders, he fights an unjust war, for which he is not at all responsible. His destiny, watching over him, holds him there in reserve, although always in the midst of glory and perils, until things go their course. It brings him back eventually, but alone and without his entourage. It pushes down before him the tumultuous waves of the sea, and forces the impetuous and oppressive winds to respect the cradle that bears him. It pushes aside the menacing fleets that strive to close its passage, and it eventually hurls him home like a helpful spirit on this land, so beautiful but torn by crimes, betrayal, treason, murder and poverty. Barely has France received his footprints, that all recognized his power. God, who distributes as he pleases, has a virtuous people present Napoleon with one - a people weary of anarchy and that an odious faction has deprived of their king. His brow, already encircled by the glorious laurel, receives the sacred band. His advent will become the beginning of the country's interior peace and of general prosperity.

Under his government souls are rejuvenated, the spirit of order is reborn, and the administrations are developed on a solid foundation and work without effort. His genius covers all. In one hand he holds the awesome blade that makes his country respected, in the other he holds the scepter of political affairs. His eye sees all, and his steps carry him everywhere. He can easily transition from the great height of vast concepts, to the level of the most complex and thankless details of the administration that he created, and whose wonders surround us. The hamlet, the hospital, the city all interest and captivate the new sovereign. Just as the sun brings nature to life, he carries his influence and his light everywhere. The plight of the poor concerns him, he who took on the destiny of many kings. No other era can compare to the era of the hero whose eulogy I write. Who has ever healed so many wounds, dried so many tears, ended so many calamities? The French people, known and renowned for the sincerity of their character will always be proud to have elevated to the highest ranks a warrior, whose words, thoughts, and deeds always concerned the glory and the happiness of his nation.

At a time of external peace, and while relatively at leisure on the throne on which he is the only ornament, the hero brings back the arts, and religion is given back its original splendor. Civilization thrives, France now embellished as if by enchantment, and the people whose opinions had pulled them apart, soon have one shared dream, one sole mind. The sovereign's glory is the nation's glory. Discord is banished, hatred ceases, and justice returns to its ordinary course to restore public peace. The progress of the Enlightenment accelerates its march. Morals, without which a people cannot be happy, return in full strength. Fortune refills the coffers of the state. The admiration of our enemies, victory, and the surprising revival of the arts bestow the most beautiful, the most majestic, the most stable guarantee, and seem to realize all hopes. What an era! What glory! What riches! What splendor before our eyes!

In times of disaster, how could the French people not have him as their leader, a hero displaying the art of conquering, the art of governing, the talent of knowing men and of using them according to their abilities, the brilliance of heroism, and the graces and charms of the mind?

It is the throne of Charlemagne⁴ that seemed to have risen again after ten centuries, if we consider the unparalleled destiny of he who took possession of it! The successor of Saint Peter⁵ leaves Rome to come again to endow with an even more noble character such a great nation.

⁴ T.R. Charlemagne – (742-814 AD) King of the Franks and First Holy Roman Emperor. Charlemagne expanded the Frankish Kingdom into a European Empire.

The most deserved praise, the only worthy of this hero is the retelling of the story of his reign; it is beyond human history. It belongs to heroic times. One needs the distance of posterity to give it an unwavering and solid judgment.

Without a doubt, we will have the right to accuse the conqueror of the Pyramids of a crime nothing can seem to justify. The young and virtuous prince fallen by his decree under a deadly shot, is a stain that forevermore darkens his reign and his glory. However if one wants to refer to and consider his political position when he was not yet absolute master of the government, one will see that it was less a crime than a mistake, as he said so himself.

The unjust war that he waged against Spain, the ally of France, was an impious action whose results undermined his authority, and were disastrous to our finances as well as our arms.

The Moscow campaign, where seven to eight hundred thousand men, treasures, and an enormous amount of equipment were lost yet again is an incalculable mistake. But show me a conqueror who is blameless, who has no mistake to his name. Henry himself, the great Henry⁶, obliged to fight at length against Philip, Duke of Albe, and the members of the league, was he not forced to abandon the good character that set him apart from the crowd of Kings in order to reach the most distant horizon of posterity? Before him Francois I⁷, after him Louis XIV and Louis XV, did they not commit their own wrongdoings!

We have the right to reproach the hero of Tilset⁸ for a few grave errors, but what notable actions! What victories! What monuments built! What institutions established! What force! His conquests brought our language to all countries - it is today the languages of all the courts.

French men and women, let us still admire, now that he is no longer, that astonishing and unique genius, he who satisfied all and for whom nothing was sufficient, he who never let anything escape his vigilance or his valor. He who never found anything below his observation, and to whom nothing appeared beneath his power. Ah! Let base flattery perish forever! But let public recognition honor the memory of him whom the Heavens took pleasure in blessing with so many qualities, remember he who stifled in France the source of the revolutionary volcano that had threatened to devour us one day. The earth fell silent before Alexander, before the Hero of Rosbach⁹, the earth, the seas, the universe itself is filled with his name. We speak highly everywhere of his reign and of his misfortunes, we admire him, we pity him. All the glory, recognition and love our ancient monarchs obtained; all the great deeds they accomplished, our hero embodies them all.

⁵ T.R. Saint Peter, one of the Twelve Apostles of the New Testament. Saint Peter was the first Pope. The successor refers to the Pope Pius VII, who left Rome to crown Napoleon as Emperor.

⁶ T.R. Henry the Great – Henry IV (1553-1610), Renowned king of France who ended a major civil war by converting to Catholicism and thus uniting French Catholics and Protestants.

⁷ T.R. (Francis I, 1494-1547). King of France who reigned during a cultural renovation, and is often considered France's first Renaissance monarch.

⁸ T.R. Tilset- A Town in Russia where Napoleon signed a treaty after his victory at the Battle of Friedland. The treaty solidified Napoleon's control of central Europe.

⁹ T.R. Hero of Rosbach – Frederick the Great (1712-1786) – Prussian King who conquered much of Europe during his reign.

Indeed, what military name, what political talent, what ancient and modern glory is not humbled before such a warrior, who from the seas of Naples to the coast of the Vistula¹⁰ kept at peace so many submissive peoples!

Yet this glory, though at its fullest, is not yet at its end. Let us follow the hero. Let us recall the immortal battles of Austerlitz¹¹, Iéna¹², Eylau¹³, of Friedland¹⁴ and so many other famous exploits besides which the first conquerors pale in comparison. But it is not there that the hero will stop - the days of Tann¹⁵, Echmühl¹⁶ and of Ratisbonne¹⁷ come to eclipse, if that is possible, all that has surprised us until now! And who will one day believe these victories that had so much at stake, that were conclusive in their consequences, hardly cost more time to the conqueror than it took to describe and publish them.

In the space of two thousand five hundred years, history has preserved for us some fifty truly memorable battles, won by forty Sovereigns. The hero of Iéna alone shows us through several decisive battles, the military glory of about five centuries renewed before our eyes in the span of sixteen years. Four great battles made Alexander famous, Caesar had no more than three, and our preeminent hero leaves Hannibal far behind.

It is in vain that we would want to tarnish or erase so much success, destroy a fame so strongly established. Unless we rip to shreds every last page of the eternal and formidable

¹⁰ T.R. Vistula - Unit of Poles in the service of Napoleonic France. The legion was formed in Breslau, Silesia, now referred to as Wrocław, in Silesia, part of modern day Poland. The name Vistula refers to the largest and most important river in Poland.

¹¹ T.R. Austerlitz - Battle of Three Empires, where the French Army defeated the Third Coalition commanded by Tsar Alexander and Francis II of the Holy Roman Empire on December 2nd 1805, near Austerlitz, then in the Austrian Empire, present day Czech Republic.

¹² T.R. Iéna - Battle of Jena-Auerstedt, Napoleon's defeat of Frederick William III of Prussia, on October 14th, 1806, on the river Saale in present day Germany which led to the subjugation of the Kingdom of Prussia to the French Empire.

¹³ T.R. Eylau - A bloody battle between the French Army and the Russian Empire in East Prussia near the town of Eylau. It was a tactical French victory, but strategically inconclusive. This battle shook the myth of Napoleon's invincibility. 7th and 8th of February 1807

¹⁴ T.R. Friedland - June 14th 1807 Napoleon's French Army defeated the Russian army in Kaliningrad Oblast - Russian province on the Baltic sea. This effectively ended the war of the Fourth Coalition against Napoleon.

¹⁵ T.R. Tann - Battle of Teugen-Hausen, or Battle of Thann, April 19th, 1809. Battle fought between the French army and the Austrian Army where the French won a difficult victory in modern-day Bavaria, Germany, between the villages of Teugen and Hausen.

¹⁶ T.R. Echmühl - Fought on April 21-22, 1809, this was the turning point in the 1809 Campaign, or, the war against the Fifth Coalition. Napoleon was unprepared for the attack but managed to defeat the Austrians anyway.

¹⁷ T.R. Rastibonne - Battle of Ratisbon, or battle of Regensburg, fought April 23rd 1809. It was a French victory against the Austrian Army. Napoleon received a minor contusion, but no severe injuries.

Moniteur¹⁸, it will be the object of admiration of our century. It will astonish centuries to come. Unless we destroy the most beautiful painted masterpieces, unless we overturn the monuments built, unless we burn the best pages of our poets, it will always make the hearts of the true French people happy.

Would I stop myself here? What is left to say? No, let us carry on. It is not enough that fortune overwhelms him with its gifts, that victory assists with consistency the laborious undertakings of the conqueror of Friedland. They will fill him, that is, surprise him with their new benefits. They entrust him with the fate of a young Princess. The prize for an enduring peace, the son of victory weds the daughter of Cesars, the Heavens blessing this union.

But in the end destiny, weary of exhausting itself to insure so much glory, weary of working for his fortune, for his rise to power, leaves him suddenly alone. The hero whom we believed was a god, is soon nothing but an ordinary mortal. He lends an ear to flattery, is dazzled by his fortune, and lets himself be overtaken by all the impetuosity of a violent personality. He rejects the wise advice of his faithful brothers in arms and his most devoted ministers, and causes Providence that had raised him up to turn against him. From one fall to the next, the hero who forgets himself reaches his ruin. The fateful battle of Waterloo was the final straw. The Younger Marius¹⁹, he is forced to go ask for refuge among his fiercest enemies. However always great even in calamity, the hero, unhappy and betrayed by a victory once disloyal to his banners, resigns himself to eternal captivity. An island in the middle of the sea is the place chosen for the prison of he who not so long ago had made Europe, or rather the whole world, resound with the sound of his name.

Let us follow him still, on his rock, usurped to Neptune's empire. There, armed with a holy philosophy, his existence is still laborious. He works with perseverance on the story of his life. He writes down in a simple and true manner both his best deeds and his gravest mistakes. However, in the midst of this work that he wants to leave to prosperity to one day explain his at once military and political life, he is devoured by the pain of being separated forever from an adored spouse, a cherished son, and a homeland that his detractors refuse him. Some friends and comrades-in-arms of his past glory have followed him into exile. They share his grief, they are his sincere and discreet confidants. They try to help him endure the bitterness of his exile. But such an active life ceases suddenly, pain wins over the steadfastness of the hero, his blood thins, his head becomes troubled, his complexion fades, his portliness turns into an awful thinness. An incurable sickness takes over the core of his being...it erodes him! Tranquil in the midst of torments, he lives only for his friends who ultimately witness his last breath.

Such was the life of a hero who is being refused a tomb in France, whom one seems to fear when he is no more! But no, Louis is just, Louis who sees and wants only the happiness and glory of his homeland, will be greater, more generous, and will only listen to his paternal heart.

¹⁸ T.R. Moniteur - French Newspaper titled "Gazette Nationale Le Moniteur Universel", founded by Charles-Joseph Panckoucke November 24th, 1789. It was the main paper during the French Revolution, and was used as a propaganda publication for Napoleon.

¹⁹ T.R. Younger Marius - Gaius Marcus the Younger, son of Consul of the Roman Empire, who died defending the city of Praeneste against the forces of Sulla during the Second Roman Civil War.

He will not refuse the French to keep, like their renowned forbears have done for Duguesclin²⁰, Turenne²¹, and so many other great captains, the honor of their country, the remains of a warrior who he no doubt has the right to complain about, but whom his magnanimous soul has never ceased to pity and to admire.

²⁰ T.R. Duguesclin French military commander during the Hundred Years' War who was buried at Saint- Denis in the tomb of Kings of France. His heart is kept at the Basilica of Saint-Sauveur at Dinan. His body was thrown in and lost in a vast trench with many of the others bodies from the old tomb during the French Revolution.

²¹ T.R.Turenne - Vicomte de Turenne (Henri de la Tour d'Auvergne) marched alongside Louis XIV. He was also interred in the tomb of the Kings of France, the Basilica of Saint-Sauveur, but his body was spared from destruction during the Revolution when it was accidentally mummified from the conditions of its burial.