

**ANALYSIS OF THE CHARACTER
OF NAPOLEON BONAPARTE:
SUGGESTED BY THE
PUBLICATION
OF SCOTT'S LIFE OF NAPOLEON**

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Analysis of the Character of Napoleon Bonaparte: Suggested by the publication of Scott's life of Napoleon by W. E. Channing

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W. E. CHANNING

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SUGGESTED
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SCOTT'S LIFE OF NAPOLEON.

BY
W. E. CHANNING, L. L. D.

Author of "Remarks on the Character and Writings of Milton."

SECOND EDITION.

"Regarding freedom as the chief interest of human nature, as essential to its intellectual, moral, and religious progress, we look on men who have signalized themselves by their hostility to it, with an indignation at once stern and sorrowful, which no glare of successful war, and no admiration of the crowd can induce us to suppress." p. 6.

"France not only subjected herself to a tyrant, but what is worse, she has given tyranny every where new pleas and arguments, and emboldened it to preach openly, in the face of heaven, the impious doctrines of absolute power and unconditional submission." p. 23.

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SOLD ALSO BY R. HUNTER, 72, ST. PAUL'S CHURCH YARD,
AND JOHN MILLER, 40, PALL MALL.

1828.

“ While Washington's a watch-word, such as ne'er
Shall sink while there's an echo left to air :
Alas ! why must the same Atlantic wave,
Which wafted freedom gird a tyrant's grave—
The king of kings, and yet of slaves the slave,
Who burst the chains of millions to renew
The very fetters which his arm broke through,
And crush'd the rights of Europe and his own
To flit between a dungeon and a throne.”

BYRON.

P R E F A C E.

THE following Analysis of the Character of Bonaparte, appeared originally in the "Christian Examiner," a periodical work, published at Boston, U. S. and was shortly after printed in a separate form. The publisher is indebted for it to the gentleman, (a friend of Dr. Channing) to whose kindness he owes the publication of the "Remarks on the Character and Writings of Milton." Encouraged by the favourable reception of that work, and believing the present calculated to do much good, he is induced to offer it to the notice of the public. For vigour of conception, accuracy of delineation, brilliancy of style, an ardent love of liberty, high toned moral feeling, and the fearless avowal of his own honest opinions, the author is pre-eminently distinguished. Sufficiently remote from the influence of European politics and prejudices, he has surveyed with the calm eye of a Philosopher and Moralist, the course and conduct of the hero of the scene. Making every allowance for the circumstances in which that extraordinary man was placed, and acknowledging his talents, to their fullest extent, he has tried their exercise by the test of utility, and the eternal principles of morality. He has shewn their unhappy misemployment,—unhappy for himself, unhappy for the world. In short, he has shewn that energy of mind, selfishly and unbenevolently exercised, is worse than worthless—it is pernicious.

LITERARY NOTICES

OF

DR. CHANNING'S PUBLICATIONS.

"Remarks on the Character and Writings of Milton."

"Dr. Channing is manifestly a man of considerable discernment and eloquent powers, capable of taking comprehensive views, and of conveying them distinctly and fully to his readers. He is no common person, and we welcome his writings to this side of the Atlantic. Every one who reads the Edinburgh, must have been pleased with Macaulay's Article on Milton; the present is superior, as it is more complete; it gives a more elevated and inspiring view of his character." *Monthly Magazine, N. S. Sept. 1826.*

"This is a clever pamphlet, and one which does credit to the taste of those concerned in introducing it to English readers. Milton's character and writings are ably and impartially examined, and the spirit and tendency of his productions powerfully developed. Indeed, we have rarely seen so much important and valuable information and comment crowded into so small a space. Dr. Channing commences with a consideration of Milton's poetical genius, and in asserting his dignity as a poet, enters into so glowing and eloquent a description of poetry itself, that we cannot forbear extracting it."—*Literary Chronicle Sept. 1826.*

"Analysis of the Character of Napoleon."

"It is refreshing to turn from our state turmoils and anomalies to the perusal of the wise and candid estimate of a character which has excited the extremes of aversion and admiration—written with that purity and freshness of feeling, spirit, and eloquence, that nothing but the love of liberty and virtue can so well inspire."—*Times, Jan. 29, 1828.*

"A pamphlet which does honour to the name it bears."—*London Mag. Feb. 1828.*

"It is a very clever production, written with considerable eloquence, and by one who is evidently capable of looking steadily at the inequalities in a great man's character, and tracing them, as far as may be, to their source."—*Athenaeum, Feb. 5, 1828.*

"This is a just and admirable appreciation of the character of Napoleon. That Dr. Channing is not dazzled by the splendour of despotism we are not surprised, since, in his character of Milton, a more glorious name than ever belonged to tyrant or satrap, he exhibited the capacity to comprehend and pour-tray the majesty of republican virtue. We recommend this pamphlet to the attentive perusal of every man in England."—*London Weekly Review, Feb. 9, 1828.*

"It is characterized by the same splendour of eloquence, the same soundness of judgment, the same nobility of feeling, and the same general impartiality for which all his writings are at once so conspicuous and so valuable."—*Literary Chronicle, Feb. 16, 1828.*

"Dr. Channing is already well known by his eloquent and able review of Milton's character and writings; and the "Character of Napoleon" is executed with equal ability and effect: if our recommendation be worth any thing at all let Dr. Channing's Analysis be carefully read."—*Monthly Mag. March, 1828.*

"A man of sound judgment and clear understanding; equally correct in feeling, and refined in taste."—*Blackwood's Mag. Aug. 1825.—Review of Discourse on the Evidences of the Christian Religion.*

"Dr. Channing, one of those men who are a blessing and an honour to their generation and their country."—*Quarterly Review, No. 56, p. 535.—Incidental Notice of Do.*

ANALYSIS
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NAPOLEON BONAPARTE.

THE Life of Napoleon Bonaparte by Sir Walter Scott has been anticipated with an eagerness, proportioned to the unrivalled power of the author, and to the wonderful endowments and fortunes of the hero. That the general expectation has been satisfied, we cannot affirm. But few will deny, that the writer has given us a monument of his great talents. The rapidity with which such a work has been thrown off astonishes us. We think, however, that the author owed to himself and to the public a more deliberate execution of this important undertaking. He should either have abandoned it, or have bestowed on it the long and patient labour which it required. The marks of negligence and haste, which are spread through the work, are serious blemishes, perhaps inexpiable defects. It wants compression and selection throughout. Many passages are encumbered with verbiage. Many thoughts are weakened by useless expansion and worse than useless repetition. Comparisons are accumulated to excess, and whilst many are exquisite, perhaps as many are trite and unworthy of history. The remarks are generally just, but obvious, and, we fear we must add, often superficial. We state these defects plainly, that we may express the more freely our admiration of the talents which have executed so rapidly a work so extensive and various, so rich in information, so fresh and vivid in description, and furnishing such abundant specimens of a free, graceful, and vigorous style.

The work has the great merit of impartiality. It is probably inaccurate in many of its details, but singularly free from prejudice and passion. Not a few, who con-

sidered that the author was both a Briton and a friend of the principles and policy of Pitt, were expecting from his pen a discoloured delineation of the implacable foe of England and of that great minister. But the rectitude of his mind, and his reverence for historical truth, have effectually preserved him from abusing the great power, conferred on him by his talents, over public opinion. We think that his laudable fear of wronging the enemy of his country, joined to an admiration of the dazzling qualities of Napoleon, has led him to soften unduly the crimes of his hero, and to give more favourable impressions than truth will warrant.

But enough of the author, who needs not our praise, and can suffer little by our censure. Our concern is with his subject. A just estimate of the late Emperor of France seems to us important. That extraordinary man, having operated on the world with unprecedented power during his life, is now influencing it by his character. That character we apprehend is not viewed as it should be. The kind of admiration which it inspires, even in free countries, is a bad omen. The greatest crime against society, that of spoiling it of its rights and loading it with chains, still fails to move that deep abhorrence, which is its due; and which if really felt, would fix on the usurper a brand of indelible infamy. Regarding freedom as the chief interest of human nature, as essential to its intellectual, moral, and religious progress, we look on men, who have signalized themselves by their hostility to it, with an indignation at once stern and sorrowful, which no glare of successful war, and no admiration of the crowd, can induce us to suppress. We mean then to speak freely of Napoleon. But if we know ourselves, we could on no account utter one unjust reproach. We speak the more freely, because conscious of exemption from every feeling like animosity. We war not with the dead. We would resist only what we deem the pernicious influence of the dead. We would devote ourselves to the cause of freedom and humanity, a cause perpetually betrayed by the admiration lavished on prosperous crime and all-grasping ambition. Our great topic will be the Character of Napoleon; and with this we shall naturally intersperse reflections on the great interests which he perpetually influenced.

We begin with observing, that it is an act of justice

to Bonaparte to remember, that he grew up under disastrous influences, in a troubled day, when men's minds were convulsed, old institutions overthrown, old opinions shaken, old restraints snapped asunder; when the authority of religion was spurned, and youth abandoned to unwonted licence; when the imagination was made feverish by visions of indistinct good, and the passions swelled by the sympathy of millions to a resistless torrent. A more dangerous school for the character cannot well be conceived. That All-seeing Being, who knows the trials of his creatures and the secrets of the heart, can alone judge to what degree crimes are extenuated by circumstances so inauspicious. This we must remember in reviewing the history of men, who were exposed to trials unknown to ourselves. But because the turpitude of an evil agent is diminished by infelicities of education or condition, we must not therefore confound the immutable distinctions of right and wrong, and withhold our reprobation from atrocities which have spread misery and slavery far and wide.

It is also due to Napoleon to observe, that there has always existed, and still exists, a mournful obtuseness of moral feeling in regard to the crimes of military and political life. The wrong-doing of public men on a large scale, has never drawn upon them that sincere, hearty abhorrence which visits private vice. Nations have seemed to court aggression and bondage by their stupid, insane admiration of successful tyrants. The wrongs, from which men have suffered most, in body and mind, are yet unpunished. True, Christianity has put into our lips censures on the aspiring and the usurping. But these reproaches are as yet little more than sounds, and unmeaning common-places. They are repeated for form's sake. When we read or hear them, we feel that they want depth and strength. They are not inward, solemn, burning convictions, breaking from the indignant soul with a tone of reality, before which guilt would cower. The true moral feeling in regard to the crimes of public men is almost to be created. We believe, then, that such a character as Bonaparte's, is formed with very little consciousness of its turpitude; and society, which contributes so much to its growth, is responsible for its existence, and merits in part the misery which it spreads.

Of the early influences under which Bonaparte was