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## Ode to Napoleon Buonaparte op. 41

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*Text: Lord Byron*

'Tis done – but yesterday a King!  
And arm'd with Kings to strive –  
And now thou art a nameless thing:  
So abject – yet alive!  
Is this the man of thousand thrones,  
Who strew'd our earth with hostile bones,  
And can he thus survive?  
Since he, miscalled the Morning Star,  
Nor man nor fiend hath fallen so far.

Ill-minded man, why scourge thy kind  
Who bow'd so low the knee?  
By gazing on thyself grown blind,  
Thou taught'st the rest to see.  
With might unquestion'd,  
– power to save, –  
Thine only gift hath been the grave  
To those that worshipped thee;  
Nor till thy fall could mortals guess  
Ambition's less than littleness!

Thanks for that lesson – it will teach  
To after-warriors more  
Than high Philosophy can preach,  
And vainly preach'd before.  
That spell upon the minds of men  
Breaks never to unite again,  
That led them to adore  
Those Pagod things of sabre sway,  
With fronts of brass, and feet of clay.

The triumph, and the vanity,  
The rapture of the strife –  
The earthquake voice of Victory,  
To thee the breath of life;  
The sword, the sceptre, and that sway  
Which man seem'd made but to obey  
Wherewith renown was rife –

All quell'd! – Dark spirit! what must be  
The madness of thy memory!

The Desolator desolate!  
The Victor overthrown!  
The Arbiter of others' fate  
A suppliant for his own!  
Is it some yet imperial hope  
That with such change can calmly cope?  
Or dread of death alone?  
To die a prince – or live a slave –  
Thy choice is most ignobly brave!

He who of old would rend the oak,  
Dream'd not of the rebound;  
Chain'd by the trunk he vainly broke –  
Alone – how look'd he round?  
Thou in the sternness of thy strength  
An equal deed hast done at length,  
And darker fate hast found:  
He fell, the forest prowler's prey;  
But thou must eat thy heart away!

The Roman, when his burning heart  
Was slaked with blood of Rome,  
Threw down the dagger – dared depart,  
In savage grandeur, home. –  
He dared depart in utter scorn  
Of men that such a yoke had borne,  
Yet left him such a doom!  
His only glory was that hour  
Of self-upheld abandon'd power.

The Spaniard, when the lust of sway  
Had lost its quickening spell,  
Cast crowns for rosaries away,  
An empire for a cell;  
A strict accountant of his beads,  
A subtle disputant on creeds,  
His dotage trifled well:  
Yet better had he neither known  
A bigot's shrine, nor despot's throne.

But thou – from thy reluctant hand  
The thunderbolt is wrung –  
Too late thou leav'st the high command  
To which thy weakness clung;  
All Evil Spirit as thou art,  
It is enough to grieve the heart  
To see thine own unstrung;  
To think that God's fair world hath been  
The footstool of a thing so mean;

And Earth hath spilt her blood for him,  
Who thus can hoard his own!  
And Monarchs bowed the trembling limb,  
And thank'd him for a throne!  
Fair Freedom! we may hold thee dear,  
When thus thy mightiest foes their fear  
In humblest guise have shown.  
Oh! ne'er may tyrant leave behind  
A brighter name to lure mankind!

Thine evil deeds are writ in gore,  
Not written thus in vain –  
Thy triumphs tell of fame no more  
Or deepen every stain:  
If thou hadst died as honour dies,  
Some new Napoleon might arise,  
To shame the world again –  
But who would soar the solar height,  
To set in such a starless night?

Weigh'd in the balance, hero dust  
Is vile as vulgar clay;  
Thy scales, Mortality! are just  
To all that pass away:  
But yet methought the living great  
Some higher sparks should animate,  
To dazzle and dismay:  
Nor deem'd Contempt could thus make mirth  
Of these, the Conquerors of the earth.

And she, proud Austria's mournful flower,  
Thy still imperial bride;  
How bears her breast the torturing hour?

Still clings she to thy side?  
Must she too bend, must she too share  
Thy late repentance, long despair,  
Thou throneless Homicide?  
If still she loves thee, hoard that gem,  
'Tis worth thy vanish'd diadem!

Then haste thee to thy sullen Isle,  
And gaze upon the sea;  
That element may meet thy smile –  
It ne'er was ruled by thee!  
Or trace with thine all idle hand  
In loitering mood upon the sand  
That Earth is now as free!  
That Corinth's pedagogue hath now  
Transferr'd his by-word to thy brow.

Thou Timour! in his captive's cage  
What thoughts will there be thine,  
While brooding in thy prison'd rage?  
But one – 'The world was mine!'  
Unless, like he of Babylon,  
All sense is with thy sceptre gone,  
Life will not long confine  
That spirit pour'd so widely forth –  
So long obey'd – so little worth!

Or, like the thief of fire from heaven,  
Wilt thou withstand the shock?  
And share with him, the unforgiven,  
His vulture and his rock!  
Foredoom'd by God – by man accurst,  
And that last act, though not thy worst,  
The very Fiend's arch mock;  
He in his fall preserved his pride,  
And, if a mortal, had as proudly died!

There was a day – there was an hour,  
While earth was Gaul's – Gaul thine –  
When that immeasurable power  
Unsated to resign  
Had been an act of purer fame  
Than gathers round Marengo's name

And gilded thy decline,  
Through the long twilight of all time,  
Despite some passing clouds of crime.

But thou forsooth must be a king,  
And don the purple vest, –  
As if that foolish robe could wring  
Remembrance from thy breast.  
Where is that faded garment? where  
The gewgaws thou wert fond to wear,  
The star – the string – the crest?  
Vain forward child of empire! say,  
Are all thy playthings snatch'd away?

Where may the wearied eye repose  
When gazing on the Great;  
Where neither guilty glory glows,  
Nor despicable state?  
Yes – one – the first – the last – the best  
The Cincinnatus of the West,  
Whom envy dared not hate,  
Bequeath'd the name of Washington,  
To make man blush there was but one!