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# **NAPOLEON THE LITTLE**

**VICTOR HUGO**

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**Napoleon the Little by Victor Hugo.**

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## 6. Everywhere The Oath

Such are the things we have beheld in France, on the occasion of the oath to M. Bonaparte. Men have sworn here, there, everywhere; at Paris, in the provinces, in the north, in the south, in the east, and in the west. There was in France, during a whole month, a tableau of hands raised, of arms outstretched, and the final chorus was: "We swear," etc. The ministers placed their oaths in the hands of the President, the prefects in those of ministers, and the mob in those of the prefects. What does M. Bonaparte do with all these oaths? Is he making a collection of them? Where does he put them? It has been remarked that none but unpaid functionaries have refused the oath, the councillors-general, for instance. The fact is, that the oath has been taken to the budget. We heard on the 29th of March a senator exclaim, in a loud voice, against the omission of his name, which was, so to speak, vicarious modesty. M. Sibour, Archbishop of Paris swore;<sup>45</sup> M. Frank Carré, procureur-general to the Court of Peers in the affair of Boulogne, swore;<sup>46</sup> M. Dupin, President of the National Assembly on the 2nd of December, swore<sup>47</sup> —O, my God! it is enough to make one wring one's hands for shame. An oath, however, is a sacred obligation.

The man who takes an oath ceases to be a man, he becomes an altar, upon which God descends. Man, that infirmity, that shadow, that atom, that grain of sand, that drop of water, that tear dropped from the eye of destiny; man, so little, so weak, so uncertain, so ignorant, so restless; man, who lives in trouble and in doubt, knowing little of yesterday, and nothing of to-morrow, seeing just enough of his road to place his foot before him, and then nothing but darkness; who trembles if he looks forward, is sad if he looks back; man, enveloped in those immensities and those obscurities, time, space, and being, and lost in them; having an abyss within him, his soul; and an abyss without, heaven; man, who at certain hours bows his head with a sacred horror, under every force of nature, under the roar of the sea, under the rustling of the trees, under the shadow of the mountain, under the twinkling of the stars; man, who can not lift his head by day, without being blinded by the light, nor by night, without being crushed by the infinite; man, who knows nothing, who sees nothing, who hears nothing, who may be swept away to-morrow, to-day, now, by the waves that pass, by the breeze that blows, by the pebble that falls, by the hour that strikes; on a certain day, man, that trembling, stumbling being, the plaything of chance and of the passing moment, rises suddenly before the riddle that is called human life, feels that there is within him something greater than this abyss,—honour! something stronger than fatality,—virtue! something more mysterious than the unknown,—faith! and alone, feeble and naked, he says to all this formidable mystery that envelopes him: "Do with me what you will, but I will do this, and I will not do that;" and proud, tranquil, serene, creating by a word a fixed point in the sombre instability that fills the horizon, as the mariner casts his anchor in the sea, he casts his oath into the future.

<sup>45</sup> As Senator.

<sup>46</sup> As First President of the Court of Appeal at Rouen.

<sup>47</sup> As a member of his Municipal Council.



































































