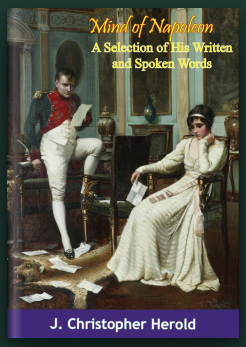
IN HIS OWN WORDS

THE MIND OF NAPOLEON

A Selection from His Written and Spoken Words

J. CHRISTOPHER HEROLD, editor and translator

Columbia University Press, 1955



HOW TO READ IT

Herold says it is *"not a source book"*: Napoleon's letters, dictations, Council of State opinions and recorded conversations, sorted into 13 themes. The fragments are *"some of them contradictory"*, and Herold left out editorial comment that *"might easily seem to establish links and relationships where perhaps none exist"*.

Trust the witnesses unevenly. Las Cases's Saint Helena memoir is *"the gospel of Napoleon worshipers"*; Caulaincourt is *"among the most interesting and reliable of the period"*; O'Meara is *"one of the Evangelists of Saint Helena"*; Antommarchi is *"not very reliable"*.

He kept only conversations *"reasonably plausible"* or corroborated. On the contradictions, the reader *"should not judge Napoleon by them"*.

THE MACHINE

For Herold, *"each thought is a step to an action"*: *"not the divine spark but a dynamo"*, run on *"Tirelessness, concentration, speed"*. He dictated to four or five secretaries at once.

His method, in Herold's words, was an "indeterminate equation":

I	exploit every opportunity and accident
II	compute all the chances
III	fix the decisive moment
IV	bend the will to circumstances
V	leave the rest to fate

His final aim? *"he did not know"*. Destiny came *"in installments"*. After about 1805 his mind *"lost its heroic cast"*.

HIS MAXIMS FOR ACTION

- Plan like a pessimist: *"There is no man more pusillanimous than I when I am planning a campaign."* Then commit: *"Once I have made up my mind, everything is forgotten except what leads to success."*
- *"And the worst thing in our enterprises is indecision."*
- Concentrate force at the decisive point. *"The simplest moves are the best."*
- *"The art consists in making others work rather than in wearing oneself out."* Herold notes he could not delegate himself.
- *"Be able to listen"*, and *"use your time to learn what you do not know"*.
- Count the money: *"outside a budget there is no salvation"*. Never forbid *"what one lacks the power to prevent"*.

IN HIS OWN WORDS · *Herold's translation; a few of the book's 13 themes*

THE HUMAN HEART

"The human heart is an abyss that deceives all calculations."

"Men are moved by two levers only: fear and self-interest."

"Men are like ciphers: they acquire their value merely from their position."

"Friendship is only a word. I love no one."

DESTINY & FORTUNE

"All great events hang by a single thread." to Talleyrand, 1797

Great men are not great because they are lucky: "being great, they have been able to master luck."

"I have made all the calculations: fate will do the rest."

THE ART OF RULING

"A statesman's heart must be in his head."

"We are here to guide public opinion, not to discuss it."

"The art of choosing men is not nearly so difficult as the art of enabling those one has chosen to attain their full worth."

THE ART OF WAR

"In war, moral factors account for three quarters of the whole; relative material strength accounts for only one quarter."

"The art of war is a simple art; everything is in the performance."

"In the long run, the sword is always beaten by the spirit."

1769 born; childhood in Corsica

1799 First Consul at thirty; builds the civil administration

1800 Bank of France founded

1804 crowned emperor, December 2

1809 annexes the Papal States; excommunicated

1814 abdicates, April 12

1815 Waterloo campaign, June 14–18

1821 dies in captivity on Saint Helena

THE OTHER SIDE

Herold does not flatter him: *"boundless egotism, deceitfulness, and callousness"*, a ruler who perfected *"mass propaganda"*. His bulletins gave the army a proverb: *"To lie like a bulletin"*.

Yet the administration he built at thirty is, for Herold, *"the one and only stable political institution France has had in the past century and a half"*. Napoleon on himself: *"I too love power—but I love it as an artist."*

Against the Hitler comparison: *"Napoleon was a lawgiver whose code spread across continents."* Herold's last word: *"To prove Napoleon wrong humanity must change."*

WHAT HE DID NOT SAY

- **"An army travels on its stomach"** isn't here. Herold says *"War must feed war"* is *"the closest that Napoleon ever came"*.
- **"Impossible is a word in the dictionary of fools"** is not in the book.
- **"Worse than a crime, it's a mistake"** is Fouché's line; Napoleon borrowed it: *"I have done worse than that: I have committed mistakes."*
- **"Power is never ridiculous"** is only *"Attributed to Napoleon in Staël"*.
- Saint Helena memoirs may misdate his remarks; many sayings come second-hand.

"There is no immortality but the memory that is left in the minds of men." NAPOLEON