

# The Napoleon Series

## Descriptions of Napoleon

### Description of Napoleon by Bourrienne

His finely-shaped head, his superb forehead, his pale countenance, and his usual meditative look, have been transferred to canvas; but the versatility of his expression was beyond the reach of imitation. All the various workings of his mind were instantaneously depicted in his countenance; and his glance changed from mild to severe, and from angry to good-humoured, almost with the rapidity of lightning. It may truly be said that he had a particular look for every thought that arose in his mind.

**Source:** *Memoirs of Napoleon Bonaparte*, Volume I, Fauvelet de Bourrienne, Charles Scribners Sons, 1891, p. 307. (Quoted)

### Description of Napoleon by the Comte d'Antraigues (1797)

" Bonaparte is a man of small stature, of sickly hue, with piercing eyes, and something in his look and mouth which is cruel, covert, and treacherous; speaking little, but very talkative when his vanity is engaged or thwarted; of very poor health because of violent humors in his blood. He is covered with letter, a disease of such a sort as to increase his vehemence and his activity. He is always full of his projects, and gives himself no recreation. He sleeps but three hours every night, and takes no medicine except when his sufferings are unendurable. This man wishes to master France, and, through France, Europe. Everything else, even in his present successes, seems but a means to the end. Thus he steals without concealment, plunders everything, is accumulating an enormous treasure of gold, silver, jewels, and precious stones. But he cares for it only as a means. This same man, who will rob a community to the last son, will without a thought give a million francs to any person who can assist him. If such a person has hate or vengeance to gratify, he will afford every opportunity to do so. Nothing stands in the way of his prevailing with a man he thinks will be useful; and with him a bargain is made in two words and two minutes, so great is his seductive power. The reverse side of his methods is this: the service rendered, he demands a complete servility, or he becomes an implacable enemy; and when he has bought traitors, their service rendered, he observes but little secrecy concerning them. This man abhors royalty: he hates the Bourbons, and neglects no means to wean his army from them. If there were a king in France other than himself, he would like to have been his maker, and would desire royal authority to rest on the tip of his own sword; that sword he would never surrender, but would plunge it into the king's heart, should the monarch cease for a moment to be subservient.' "

**Source:** *Life of Napoleon Bonaparte*, Volume II, William M. Sloane, The Century Company, 1896, p. 19.

## **Description of Napoleon by Doctor Corvisart, his personal physician**

The following description of Napoleon was made by Doctor Corvisart in 1802:

"Napoleon was of short stature, about five feet two inches by French measure [5 feet 6 inches, English measure], and well built, though the bust was rather long. His head was big and the skull largely developed. His neck was short and his shoulders broad. His legs were well shaped, his feet were small and well formed. His hand, and he was rather proud of it, was delicate, and plump, with tapering fingers. His forehead was high and broad, his eyes gray, penetrating and wonderfully mobile; his nose was straight and well shaped. His teeth were fairly good, and mouth perfectly modelled, the upper lip slightly drawn down towards the corner of the mouth, and the chin slightly prominent. His skin was smooth and his complexion pale, but of a pallor which denoted a good circulation of blood. His very fine chestnut hair, which, until the time of the expedition to Egypt, he had worn long, cut square and covering his ears, was clipped short. The air was thin on the upper part of the head, and left bare his forehead.

"The shape of his face and the *ensemble* of his features were remarkably regular. When excited by any violent passion his face took on a stern and even terrible expression. A sort of rotary movement very visibly produced itself on his forehead and between his eyebrows; his eyes flashed fire; his nostrils dilated, swollen with the inner storm. He seemed to be able to control at will these explosions, which, by the way, as time went on, became less and less frequent. His head remained cool. In ordinary life his expression was calm, meditative, and gently grave. When in a good humor, or when anxious to please, his expression was sweet and caressing, and his face was lighted up by a most beautiful smile. Amongst familiars his laugh was loud and mocking."

**Source:** *Napoleon - An Intimate Account of the Years of Supremacy 1800-1814*, Edited by Proctor Patterson Jones, published by Random House, Inc., 1992, pp. 52-53

## **Description of Napoleon by Various Eye Witnesses**

"In the Spring of 1802, Madame d'Arblay (Fanny Burney) joined her husband who was in Paris where he had been engaged in seeking to recover any part of his natural inheritance. While there, from time to time she wrote to her relatives in England. One of her letters gives an account of her successful attempt to see the First Consul.

'At length the door of the audience chamber was thrown wide open and an officer descended the three steps into our apartment and called out, Le Premier Consul!

'You will readily believe nothing more was necessary to obtain attention; not a soul spoke or stirred as he and his suite passed along. I had a view so near, though so brief, of his face, as to be very much struck by it. It is of a deeply impressive cast, pale even to sallowness, while not only in the eyes, but in every feature--care, thought, melancholy, and meditation are strongly marked. with so much of character, nay, genius, and so

penetrating a seriousness, or rather sadness, as powerfully to sink into an observer's mind."

'Yet, though the busts and medallions I have seen are, in general, such good resemblances that I think I should have known him untold, he has by no means the look to be expected from Bonaparte, but rather that of a profoundly studious and contemplative man, who 'o'er books consumes' not only the 'midnight oil' but his own daily strength, 'and wastes the puny body to decay' by abstruse speculation and theoretic plans. But the look of the commander who heads his own army, who fights his own battles, who conquers every difficulty by personal exertion, who executes all he plans, who performs even all he suggests; whose ambition is of the most enterprising, and whose bravery is of the most daring cast:--this, which is the look to be expected from the situation, and the exploits which have led to it, the spectator watches for in vain. The plainness, also, of his dress, so conspicuously contrasted by the finery of all around him, conspires forcibly with his countenance, so 'sicklied o'er with the pale hue of thought,' to give him far more the air of a student than of a warrior.'

"Later on she witnessed the review, of which she writes: 'It was far more superb than anything I have ever beheld. Bonaparte, mounting a beautiful and spirited white horse, accompanied by his generals rode round the ranks, holding his bridle indifferently in either hand. After making his round, the First Consul stationed himself opposite to the window at which I was placed; and thence he presented some swords of honour spreading out one arm with an air and mien which changed his looks from that of scholastic severity to one that was highly military and commanding."

"In the same year, Lord Aberdeen visited Paris, when he had much conversation with the First Consul and was greatly fascinated by his singular beauty. He used to say 'that Napoleon's smile was the most beautiful he ever saw, and that his eye was wholly unlike that of any other man.' "

"Mrs. St. George, writing from Paris in 1803 to Mary Leadbeater, says: 'I have been presented to Bonaparte and his wife, who received with great state, ceremony, and magnificence. His manner is very good, but the expression of his countenance is not attractive. Curran says he has the face of a gloomy tyrant. Another compared him to a corpse with living eyes and a painter remarked to me that the smile on his lips never seemed to accord with the rest of his features.' "

"A remarkable event of the "Hundred Days" was the ceremony at "Champ de Mai," where Napoleon met the deputies from the Departments, and distributed eagles to the representatives of his forces. A young American who was a student at one of the colleges in Paris, was present during the whole of this latter ceremony, and in relating his experiences of the day (June 1, 1815) states in an article printed in the Atlantic Monthly many years ago, that he saw Napoleon more distinctly than at any previous time. His account reads as follows: 'I stood among my friends, the soldiers who lined the way. His four brothers preceded him in one carriage, while he sat alone in a state coach, all glass and gold, to which pages clung wherever they could find a footing.

'He was splendidly attired, and wore a Spanish hat with drooping feathers. As he moved slowly through the crowd, he bowed to the right and left, not in the hasty, abrupt way which is generally attributed to him, but in a calm, dignified, though absent manner.

'His face was one not to be forgotten. I saw it repeatedly; but whenever I bring it up, it comes before me, not as it appeared from the window of the Tuileries, or when riding among his troops, or when standing, with folded arms or his hands behind him, as they defiled before him; but it rises on my vision as it looked that morning, under the nodding plumes, smooth, massive, and so tranquil, that it seemed impossible a storm of passion could ever ruffle it. The complexion was clear olive, without a particle of color, no trace was on it to indicate what agitated his soul. The repose of that marble countenance told nothing of the past, nor of anxiety for the deadly struggle that awaited him. The cheering sounds around him did not change him; they fell on an ear that heard them not. His eye glanced on the multitude but it saw them not. There was more machinery than soul in the recognition as his head instinctively swayed toward them. The idol of stone was there, joyless and impassive, taking its lifeless part in this last pageant. But the thinking, active man was elsewhere, and returned only when he found himself in the presence of delegated France, and in the more congenial occupation which followed that part of the day's celebration.' "

Source: *The Opinions and Reflections of Napoleon*, Edited by Lewis Claflin Breed, The Four Seas Company, 1926. (Quoted)

This article originally appeared on John Schneider's Napoleonic Literature website and is used with his permission.

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