

NAPOLEON POEMS

Until about 1825 Hugo was, like all his Romantic contemporaries, a royalist and a Catholic. This attitude may be in part attributed to the influence of Chateaubriand, who was then at the height of his fame. Hugo prefers to tell us that his mother's influence molded his opinions in his youth, but that his early manhood was swayed by the Napoleonic enthusiasms of his father, who had been a general in Napoleon's armies. It appeared inevitable, however, all other influences apart, that Hugo should be deeply impressed by the splendid contrasts of Napoleon's career. At one time he appeared destined to become an inveterate chauvinist, or jingo, so vehemently does he celebrate the heroisms of the Napoleonic period, and so unreservedly does he accept Napoleon's brilliant victories as their own sufficient justification. The poems he wrote while the fever lasted are resonant with military ardor, and are so stimulating as almost to disarm criticism. With advancing years there is a noticeable diminution in this martial fervor, which yields to a nobler passion for peace. Napoleon is rarely mentioned without admiration, but he is mentioned less often; and it is significant of Hugo's maturer views that in the poem of "Les mages" (1856), where he enumerates at great length the many benefactors of mankind, neither Napoleon nor any conqueror is given a place.

This group of Napoleon poems is of interest as illustrating the changes in Hugo's views regarding the Bonapartes. In "Ruonaparte" he is hostile to Napoleon I; in "Lui" he is hesitating, not quite sure whether Napoleon is "ange ou démon," but with a leaning in favor of the "empereur puissant"; in "A la colonne," "Napoléon II," and "Le retour de l'empereur" we have the full measure of the poet's admiration; and in "L'expiation" his admiration for the great emperor is mingled with a certain feeling of satisfaction at the retributory misfortunes which overtook the giant and with a strong feeling of contempt for Napoleon III.

This group illustrates also the three main poetic *manners* of Hugo. "Buonaparte" furnishes examples of his first manner, when he wrote, as a young man of twenty, in the academic style as practiced by the last representatives of classicism. In "Lui" we have a less pronounced form of this academic manner, while in the three pieces that follow