The Preface to Napoleon's History of Cæsar.

The preface to this long-expected work has just appeared, and reaches us by the last European mail. Few of the Paris journals comment upon it, and the *Constitutionnel* speaks of it in a style of painful and humiliating homage. The preface, which is published in the *Moniteur*, is as follows:

Historical truth ought not to be less sacred than religion. If the precepts of faith elevate our soul above the interests of this world, the lessons of history, in their turn, inspire us with the love of the beautiful and the just, with a hatred for everything which is an obstacle to the advancement of the welfare of mankind. Those lessons, to be profitable, require certain conditions. It is necessary that facts should be reproduced with rigorous exactitude, that political and social changes should be philosophically analyzed, that the piquant attraction of the details of the lives of public men should not distract attention from their political task or throw their providential mission into oblivion. The historian too often gives us the various phases of history as spontaneous events, without divining deeper into anterior facts for their real origin and natural deduction; in like manner as the artist, who in reproducing the accidents of nature devotes himself solely to their picturesque effect without being able in his picture to give their scientific demonstration. The historian ought to be more than a painter; he ought, like the geologist, who explains the phenomena of the globe, to disclose the secret of the transformation of the social world. But in writing history, what are the means to ascertain the truth? The only way is to follow the rules of logic. Let us take it for granted as one that great results are always due to a great cause, never to a small one; in other words, an incident insignificant in appearance never leads to great results without a pre-existing cause which has rendered that small incident to achieve a great result. A spark does not create a great conflagration unless it falls upon combustible materials accumulated beforehand. Montesquieu confirms this idea: "It is not good fortune," he says, "which rules the world. . . . There are general causes, either moral or physical, which act in every monarchy, elevate it, uphold it, or ruin it. All incidents are subjected to these causes and if the chance of battle—that is to say, a special cause—has ruined the state, there existed a general cause which implied that that state was to perish in a single battle; in fact, the chief inducements always exist in great incidents. (1.) If during a period of nearly one thousand years, the Romans always issued forth triumphant from the most severe trials and from the greatest dangers, it is because there was a general cause which always rendered them superior to their enemies, and which did not suffer defeats and partial disasters to lead to a fall of their sway. If the Romans, after giving to the world the example of a people establishing themselves firmly, and growing great by liberty, have seemed since Cæsar to throw themselves blindly into serfdom, it is because there existed a general reason which fatally prevented the republic from returning to the pure form of its former institutions; it is because it wants, and the new interests of a society in labor required other means to be used. For the same manner that logic proves to us in important events the reason why they are imperative, in like manner we must recognize in the long duration of an institution the proof of its worth, and in the incontestable influence of a man upon his age the proof of his genius. The task consists, then, in endeavoring to discover the vital element which constituted the strength of the institution and the predominating idea which made the man act. Following this rule we shall avoid the errors of those historians who collect facts transmitted by preceding annalists, and arranging them according to their philosophical importance; glorifying what deserves censure, and leaving in the dark that which merits praise. It is not a minute analysis of the Roman organization which will make us understand the duration of so great an empire, but a deep investigation into the spirit of its institutions; it is not, moreover, a detailed narrative of the lesser acts of a superior man which will reveal to us the secret of his ascendency, but a careful examination of the elevated motives of his conduct. When extraordinary facts demonstrate an eminent genius, what can be more contrary to good sense than to attribute to him all the passions and sentiments of mediocrity? What more erroneous than not to recognize the pre-eminence of those privileged beings, who appear from time to time in history as brilliant beacons, dissipating the darkness of their epoch and throwing light upon the future? To deny such pre-eminence would, moreover, be a insult to human nature, by believing it capable of submitting for a length of time and voluntarily to a domination of which it would have no incontestable utility. Let us be logical, and we shall be just. Too many historians find it more easy to lower men of genius than to raise themselves by a generous inspiration to their level to properly comprehend their vast designs. Thus, as regards Cæsar, instead of showing us Rome torn by civil wars, corrupted by wealth, treading its ancient institutions under foot, threatened by powerful nations—the Gauls, the Germans, and the Parthians—incapable of maintaining itself without a master, more or less powerful, more or less wise, elevate