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HISTORY OF EUROPE

FROM THE COMMENCEMENT OF THE

FRENCH REVOLUTION

IN 1789,

TO THE RESTORATION OF THE BOURBONS

IN 1815.

BY ARCHIBALD ALISON, F.R.S.E.,

ADVOCATE.

IN FOUR VOLUMES.

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1842.
the interests, and rousing the passions of every class of the people, it brought unheed-of armies into the field, and was carried on with a degree of exasperation unknown in civilized times. But from this strife of principle, as well as interest, the fair fabric of civil liberty is destined, let us hope, at length to emerge, if not in the country where it arose, at least elsewhere in the world; and in the efforts both of sovereigns to crush and demagogues to madden its spirit, are to be found the seeds of the eventual moderation finally impressed upon the masses of the people, and a better temper induced by the sufferings than can ever arise from the unbroken prosperity of mankind.

The intelligence of the declaration of war was received with joy by all France, and by none more so than by those districts which were destined to suffer most from its ultimate effects. The Jacobins beheld in it the termination of their apprehensions occasioned by the emigrants, and the uncertain conduct of the king. The Constitutionalists hoped that the common danger would unite all the factions which now distracted the commonwealth, while the field of battle would mow down the turbulent characters whom the Revolution had brought forth. A few of the Feuillants only reproached the assembly with having violated the Constitution, and begun a war of aggression, which could not fail in the end to terminate fatally for France.*

It communicated a new impulse to the public mind, already so strongly excited. The districts, the municipalities, and the clubs wrote addresses to the assembly, congratulating them on having vindicated the national honour; arms were prepared, pikes forged, gits provided, and the nation seemed impatient only to receive its invaders. But the efforts of patriotism, strong as an anxiety with a military force, are seldom able to supply its place. The first combats were all unsuccessful to the French arms; and it will more than once appear in the sequel, that, had the allies acted with more decision, and pressed on to Paris before military experience had been superadded to the enthusiasm of their adversaries, there can be no doubt that the war might have been terminated in a single campaign.†

They solicited the attention of the assembly about this time in different quarters, which evinced the pernicious nature of the principles which were now promulgated from the French capital.

The first of these was the massacre of Avignon. This city had been the theatre of bloody events ever since the period of its union with France. This encroachment upon the rights of the Holy See had been consented to with extreme reluctance by Louis, and never thoroughly acquiesced in by the inhabitants. Two parties, one favourable, the other opposed to the incorporation, divided the city. The latter had murdered Lecuyer, secretary to the municipality, at the foot of the altar, whither he had fled for refuge. The revenge of the popular party was slow, but not less atrocious. In silence they collected their forces, and at length, when all assistance was withdrawn from the city. The gates were closed, the walls guarded so as to render escape impossible, and a band of assassins sought out, in their own houses, the individuals destined for death. Sixty unhappy

* Th., ii, 77. † Mign., i, 169. Toul., ii, 131. Th., ii, 70.

wretches were speedily thrust into prison, where, during the obscurity of night, the murderers wreaked their vengeance with impunity. One young man put fourteen to death with his own hand, and at length only desisted from excess of fatigue; the father was brought to witness the massacre of his children; the children of the father, to aggravate their sufferings: twelve women perished after having undergone tortures worse than death itself; an old priest, remarkable for a life of meekness, who had been used as a sentinel, was pursued and sacrificed by the objects of his bounty. When vengeance had done its worst, the remains of the victims were torn and mutilated, and heaped up in a ditch or thrown into the Rhone.*

The recital of these atrocities excited the utmost commiseration in the assembly. Cries of indignation arose on all sides; the president fainted after reading the letter which communicated its details. But this, like almost all the other crimes of the popular party during the progress of the Revolution, remained unpunished. The legislature, after some delay, felt it necessary to proclaim an amnesty, and some of the authors of this massacre afterward fell the victims, on the 31st May, of the sanguinary passions of which they had given so cruel an example. In a revolution, the ruling power, themselves supported by the populace, can seldom punish their excesses; the period of reaction must be waited for before it can, in general, be attempted.†

The second catastrophe, more extensive in its operation, yet more terrible in its details, was the revolt of St. Domingo. The slaves in that flourishing colony, St. Domingo, agitated by the intelligence which they *

received of the levelling principles of the Constituent Assembly, had early manifested symptoms of insubordination. The assembly, divided between the desire of enfranchising so large a body of men, and the evident dangers of such a step, had long hesitated on the course they should adopt, and were inclined to support the rights of the planters. But the passions of the negroes were excited by the efforts of a society styled "The Society of Friends of the Blacks," of which Brissot was the leading member; and the mulattoes and insubordinate by the sacred advice, to organize an insurrection. They trusted that they would be able to control the ferocity of the slaves even during the heats of a revolt; they little knew the dissimulation and cruelty of the savage character. A universal revolt was planned and organized, without the slightest suspicion on the part of the planters, and the same night fixed on for its breaking out over the whole island.†

At length, at midnight, on the 30th October, the insurrection broke forth. In an instant twelve hundred coffee and two thousand hundred sugar plantations were in flames; the buildings, the machinery, the farm-offices, reduced to ashes; the unfortunate proprietors hunted down, murdered, or thrown into the flames by the infuriated negroes. The horrors of a wild war universally appeared. The unchained African signaled his innocence by the discovery of new names inscribed on the prison walls of all unhappy planters was sawed asunder between two boards; the horrors inflicted on the women exceeded anything known even in the annals of

* Lac., i, 213. Toul., ii, 97. † Lac., i, 212. ‡ Toul., ii, 98. Lac., i, 214.
Christian ferocity. The indulgent master was sacrificed equally with the inmate, on all alike, the young and old, rich and poor, the wretches of an oppressed race were indiscriminately wreaked. Crowds of slaves traversed the country with the heads of the white children affixed on their pikes; they served as the standards of these furious assemblages. In a few instances only, the humanity of the negro character resisted the savage contagion of the time; and some faithful slaves, at the hazard of their own lives, fed in caves their masters or their children, whom they had rescued from destruction.

The intelligence of these disasters excited an angry discussion in the assembly. Brisot, the most vehement opponent of slavery, ascribed them all to the refusal of the blessings of freedom to the negroes; the moderate members, to the inflammatory addresses circulated among them by the Anti-Slavery Society of Paris. At length it was agreed to concede the political rights for which they contended to the men of colour; and, in consequence of that resolution, St. Domingo obtained the nominal blessings of freedom. But it is not thus that the great changes of nature are conducted; a child does not acquire the strength of manhood in an hour, or a tree the consistency of the hardy denizens of the forest in a season. The hasty philanthropists who conferred upon an ignorant slave population the precipitate gift of freedom, did them a greater injury than their worst enemies. The black population remains to this day, in St. Domingo, a mere example of the ruinous effect of precipitate emancipation. Without the steady habits of civilized society; ignorant of the wants which reconcile to a life of labour; destitute of the support which a regular government might have afforded, they have brought to the duties of cultivated the habits of savage life. To the indolence of the negro character they have joined the vices of European corruption; profligate, idle, and disorderly, they have declined both in numbers and in happiness; from being the greatest sugar plantation in the world, the island has been reduced to the necessity of importing that valuable produce; and the inhabitants, naked and voluptuous, are fast receding into the state of nature from which their ancestors were torn, two centuries ago, by the rapacity of Christian avatars.

Meanwhile the disasters of the armies, the natural effect of thirty years' unbroken Continental peace, and recent license and insubordination, produced the utmost consternation in Paris. The power of the Jacobins was rapidly increasing; their affiliated societies were daily extending their ramifications throughout France, and the debates of the parent club shook the kingdom from one end to another. They accused the Royalists of having occasioned the defeats, by raising unreasonable cries of Sambre et Meuse; the aristocrats could not dissemble their joy at events which promised shortly to bring the allied armies to Paris, and restore the ancient régime; the generals attributed their disasters to Dumourier, who had planned the campaign; he ascribed everything to the defective mode in

which his orders had been executed. Disturb and recrimination universally prevailed.

In this emergency, the assembly took the most energetic measures for ensuring Royal guard own authority and the public safety: disbanded. They declared their sittings permanent, disbanded the guard of the king, which had excited the popular jealousy, and passed a decree condemning the refractory clergy to exile. To secure the capital from insult, they directed the formation of a camp of twenty thousand men near Paris, and sought to maintain the enthusiasm of the disbanded revolutionary fêtes, and increase their efficiency by arming them with pikes. The disbanding of the royal guard was carried only by a small majority, and in spite of the most violent opposition. "The veil," said Gerardin, "is now withdrawn; the insurrection against the throne is no longer disguised. We are called on, in a period of acknowledged public danger, to remove the last constitutional protection from the crown. Why are we always told of the dangers to be apprehended from the Royalist faction? a party weak in numbers, despicable in influence, whom it would be so easy to subdue. I see two factions and a double set of dangers, and one advances by hasty strides to a regicide government. Would to God my anticipations may prove unfounded! But I cannot shut my eyes to the striking analogy of the two countries: I cannot forget that, in a similar crisis, the Long Parliament disbanded the guard of Charles I, and its fate awaited that unhappy monarch? What now awaits the constitutional sovereign of the French?"

The royal guard was remodelled after its dissolution: the officers in part chosen from a different class, the staff put into different hands, and companies of pikemen introduced from the fan-bourgs to neutralize the loyalty of their fellow-soldiers. The Constitutional party made the most vigorous remonstrances against these hazardous innovations. But the disasters were plain: the approach of danger and the public agitation had thrown the whole weight of government into the hands of the Jacobins.

The evident peril of his situation roused the pacific king into more than usual vigour. His ministers were incessantly urging him to give his sanction to the decree of exile against the non-juring priests, and to admit the Constitutional clergy free access to his person, in order to move all ground for complaint on the score of religion. But on these points Louis was immovable. Indifferent to personal danger, comparatively insensible to the diminution of the royal prerogative, he was resolutely determined to make no compromise with his religious duties. By degrees he became estranged from the party of the Girondists, and remained several days without addressing them, or letting them know his determination in that particular. It was then that Madame Roland wrote, in name of her husband, the famous letter to the king, in which she strongly urged him to become with sincerity a constitutional monarch, and put an end to the public troubles by sanctioning the decrees against the priests. This letter, written with much eloquence, but in too Republican a spirit, excited the anger of Louis, and Servan,