

"HE THAT LOVES READING HAS EVERYTHING WITHIN HIS REACH."

SCENES FROM THE FIRST FRENCH REVOLUTION.

"The rule of a mob is the worst of tyrannies."—ARISTOTLE.

FRANCE—and more especially France's capital, Paris—is, according to the late Mr. William Makepeace Thackeray,

"That land of revolution that grows the tri-colour."

It seems almost necessary to the very existence of the people that there should be an outbreak at least every quarter of a century, and some blood-letting to reduce the plethora of their pride. This is a very sad state of things; but still, as history teaches, it exists. If they cannot quarrel with neighbouring nations they fall foul of each other, and belabour themselves until they desist from pure exhaustion. Such an excitable nation, it must be admitted, are not by any means the most agreeable neighbours; and we have much to be thankful for that we are separated from them by that little strip of silver sea—"our national life"—in which Mr. Gladstone places so much assurance. The French are always shouting out for liberty; but they forget that the first duty of those who desire liberty is to respect the law. That lesson the French do not appear to take to heart—a fact of which we have of late had such terrible testimony.

It is to be hoped that when the passions and prejudices aroused by the recent terrific struggle on the Continent have subsided, some impartial historian may deem it his duty to give to the world a true narrative of the causes and results of the late war—by what forces and follies it was brought about, and by what miseries and monstrosities it was followed. Could a companion picture be found for that wonderful work of Carlyle, descriptive of the first French Revolution, setting forth the horrors of the last, it would prove a rare acquisition to the realms of literature. A comparison, too, of the proceedings of the recent Commune under its leaders with those of the Bloody Tribune under Robespierre and his fellow fiends would be found pregnant with useful instruction and curious information. But cruel, and cowardly, and absurd as the acts of the Commune have been, they do not bear upon their face the stamp of ferocity which brand those rulers of France towards the close of the last century. In the recent convulsions, terrible deeds of blood and brutality have been committed; but it cannot be asserted, as in the Reign of Terror, that the perpetrators were actuated by personal malice; nor was it as before, strictly speaking, a war of class against class. The Commune was comparatively meaningless in its madness, whilst the Tribune had method in its madness. It is true that the Archbishop of Paris and some members of the clergy were slaughtered in cold blood; but there was no systematic onslaught made upon the educated, the beautiful, and the high-born, as was made under the rule of Robespierre and Barère.* Still there is no excuse for the vicious and heartless men who have laid the most beautiful capital of the world in ruins—the iconoclasts and Vandals who made war upon monuments, destroying the artistic evidence of their country's past prowess.

But whatever may be said of the last French Revolution, its horrors did not equal—scarcely approached the horrors of the first French Revolution; and those who will take the trouble to peruse the following pictures of the Reign of Terror, as painted by SIR ARCHIBALD ALISON, in his excellent "*History of Europe*," will

* Barère acquired, from the flowery style when speaking of the acts of the Republicans, the name of the "Anacreon of the Guillotine."

obtain some insight into the horrors of a generation gone by, which for brutality, tyranny, cruel cowardice, and moral depravity, far exceeded the crimes perpetrated by any other civilised nation:—

"On the day of the execution of the queen, Barère regaled Robespierre, St Just, and some others of their party, at a tavern. Robespierre condemned the proceedings against the queen, and in particular Hébert's monstrous evidence, with so much vehemence that he broke his plate during the violence of his gesticulation. But Barère and the others defended the proceedings, and announced more extensive plans of carnage. 'The vessel of the Revolution,' said he, 'cannot be wafted into port but on waves of blood. We must begin with the members of the Constituent and Legislative Assemblies. That rubbish must be swept away.'"

"The Duke of Orleans, the early and interested instigator of the Revolution, was its next victim. He demanded only one favour, which was granted, that his execution should be postponed for twenty-four hours. In the interval, he had a repast prepared with care, on which he feasted with more than usual avidity. When led out to execution, he gazed for a time, with a smile on his countenance, on the Palais Royal, the scene of his former orgies. He was detained above a quarter of an hour in front of that palace by order of Robespierre, who had in vain asked his daughter's hand in marriage, and had promised, if he would relent in that extremity, to excite a tumult which would save his life. Depraved as he was, he had too much honourable feeling left to consent to such a sacrifice, and remained in expectation of death, without giving the expected signal of acquiescence, for twenty minutes, when he was permitted to continue his journey to the scaffold. He met his fate with stoical fortitude; and it is pleasing to have to record one redeeming trait at the close of a life stained by so much selfish passion and guilty ambition—he preferred death to sacrificing his daughter to the tyrant."

"Nor was the state of the prisons in Paris and over France a less extraordinary and memorable monument of the Reign of Terror. When the Girondists were overthrown, on the 31st May, 1793, the number of prisoners in the different jails of Paris was about 1150; but, before three months of the Reign of Terror had elapsed, their number was doubled, and it gradually rose to an average of six, seven, and at last eight thousand, constantly in captivity in the metropolis alone. The whole prisons in the capital being filled by this prodigious crowd, the castle of Vincennes was surveyed with a view to additional accommodation, and the Jacobins boasted it could contain six or seven thousand more."

Here is a description of the last moments of three of the celebrated leaders in the Revolution—Hérault de Séchelles, Camille Desmoulins, and Danton—they having been condemned to the guillotine by their former associates:—

"Lucile, the youthful wife of Camille Desmoulins, earnestly besought Madame Danton, a young woman of eighteen, to throw herself at Robespierre's feet, and pray for the lives of both their husbands, but she refused. 'I will willingly,' said she, 'follow Danton to the scaffold, but I will not degrade his memory before his rival. If he owed his life to Robespierre, he would never pardon me, in this world or the next. He has bequeathed to me his honour—I will preserve it entire.' Camille Desmoulins had less firmness. He tried to read '*Young's Night Thoughts*,' but the book fell from his hands, and he could only articulate, 'O my Lucile, O my Horace, what will become of you! They went to the scaffold with the stoicism so usual at that period. A numerous escort attended them, and an immense crowd was assembled, which beheld in silence their former leaders led out to execution. Camille Desmoulins exclaimed, when seated on the fatal chariot—'This, then, is the recompense awarded to the first apostle of liberty!' In moving towards the scaffold, he