

OUR TABLE.

HISTORY OF EUROPE, FROM THE COMMENCEMENT OF THE FRENCH REVOLUTION TILL THE RESTORATION OF THE BOURBONS, IN 1815. BY ARCHIBALD ALISON, F. R. S. E.—EDINBURGH.

THE history of the stormy years which are included in the quarter of a century previous to the Battle of Waterloo, is one which is literally crowded with events of mighty interest to the world. There is scarcely a day in the whole period that has not something memorable recorded of it—some deed of terror, frightful from its atrocity, or some field of victory, won by the sacrifice of human blood, whose gore-dripping laurels have stamped its name on the historic page—and which, wonderful though it be, has elicited the admiration of thinking and reasoning men!

The revolution itself, with its torn and bleeding hearts—its treacheries, plots, conspiracies—its hideous and revolting murders—though at the time it filled the world with horror, was, before its victims had decayed, all but forgotten in the wonder with which mankind watched the course of the terrible being, who was the “Child of the Revolution,” and who became the “spoiler of hearts and empires”—the portioner of kingdoms,—the bestower of crowns and sceptres; and whose ambition aimed at universal sway over the civilized and uncivilized world.

To trace the story of Napoleon is to tell the history of Europe, from the time when he arrived at manhood, and became the leader of the republican hosts of France, until, at the close of his last and most disastrous battle, the ever-to-be-remembered Field of Waterloo, he became a fugitive from the wrath his unparalleled crimes had raised against him, in the breasts of the millions who had felt the iron rod of his despotic power, and who, though of all nations, origins, and tongues, became as brethren in the bond of enmity against him, which alike fired the breasts of all.

Since his disastrous fall, the world has been deluged with histories, biographies, tales, romances, novels, dramas, and songs, having for their foundation the epoch which called him to be the ruler and scourge of France and of Continental Europe. His achievements, while borne along upon the overwhelming torrent which he raised, are a never failing source which the dealer in the marvellous, whether in fancy or in realities, “stranger than fiction,” need not fear to exhaust. Genius, learning, talent, have been ransacked, to give greater effect to what, in itself, it is impossible to colour too highly. Pre-eminent in grandeur, as he was in all the attributes of the dreadful and repulsive, the highest aim of the truly gifted historian should be to present him as he was, and his achievements as they occurred. It is, indeed, to “gild refined gold” to give to his life anything of mere startling brightness which it did not wear. But almost all who have written of him have attempted it. Indeed, it seems to be a natural consequence of the kind of fame he won, and of the high “bad eminence” he reached. Even in the book which has given occasion to this notice, there is not unfrequently an error of the same description. Though the book is destined to hold the highest place among the works which treat of this extraordinary man, it has many of these blemishes, as if the author had been occasionally dazzled by the glory of the conqueror’s career. Notwithstanding these objections, however, the work will rank among the noblest histories which ever proceeded from the pen of man.

We have seldom read a book in which the attention is more regularly chained to the subject treated of than this. Though it adheres closely to the facts, they wear so closely round them, the witchery of romance, that even the lover of the wonderful could not fail to be charmed with their perusal. But the life of Napoleon was almost all romance. The humble child of lowly parents, forcing his way almost from the ranks in which he served, into the proud position of an Imperial Governor, filling the throne, and wearing the crown of Charlemagne—eclipsing the glory of that mighty sovereign, and surrounding himself with the gorgeous spoils of crushed and ruined states and empires—filling the earth with the renown of his deeds, and the terror of his arms. Truly, no romance can exceed the tale in all the attributes which fire the imagination, and kindle the torch of fancy.

The work will occupy ten large volumes, nine of which are already published,—and, beginning with the commencement of the Reign of Terror, it gives a comprehensive, clear, and complete detail of everything which occurred in Europe until the defeat of Napoleon.