

AN
HISTORICAL AND MORAL VIEW
OF THE
ORIGIN AND PROGRESS
OF THE
FRENCH REVOLUTION;
AND THE
EFFECT IT HAS PRODUCED
IN
EUROPE.

BY MARY WOLLSTONECRAFT.

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ADVERTISEMENT.

THIS history, taking in such a variety of facts and opinions, has grown under my hand; especially as in writing I cannot avoid entering into some desultory disquisitions, and descriptions of manners and things which, though not strictly necessary to elucidate the events, are intimately connected with the main object; I have also been led into several theoretical investigations, whilst marking the political effects that naturally flow from the progress of knowledge. It is probable, therefore, that this work will be extended to two or three more volumes, a considerable part of which is already written.

P R E F A C E.

THE revolution in France exhibits a scene, in the political world, not less novel and interesting than the contrast is striking between the narrow opinions of superstition, and the enlightened sentiments of masculine and improved philosophy.

To mark the prominent features of this revolution, requires a mind, not only unsophisticated by old prejudices, and the inveterate habits of degeneracy; but an amelioration of temper, produced by the exercise of the most enlarged principles of humanity.

The rapid changes, the violent, the base, and nefarious assassinations, which have clouded the vivid prospect that began to
spread

spread a ray of joy and gladness over the gloomy horizon of oppression, cannot fail to chill the sympathizing bosom, and paralyse intellectual vigour. To sketch these vicissitudes is a task so arduous and melancholy, that, with a heart trembling to the touches of nature, it becomes necessary to guard against the erroneous inferences of sensibility; and reason beaming on the grand theatre of political changes, can prove the only sure guide to direct us to a favourable or just conclusion.

This important conclusion, involving the happiness and exaltation of the human character, demands serious and mature consideration; as it must ultimately sink the dignity of society into contempt, and its members into greater wretchedness; or elevate it to a degree of grandeur not hitherto anticipated, but by the most enlightened statesmen and philosophers.

Contemplating then these stupendous events with the cool eye of observation, the judge-

ment, difficult to be preserved unwarped under the pressure of the calamitous horrors produced by desperate and enraged factions, will continually perceive that it is the uncontaminated mass of the french nation, whose minds begin to grasp the sentiments of freedom, that has secured the equilibrium of the state; often tottering on the brink of annihilation; in spite of the folly, selfishness, madness, treachery, and more fatal mock patriotism, the common result of depraved manners, the concomitant of that servility and voluptuousness which for so long a space of time has embruted the higher orders of this celebrated nation.

By thus attending to circumstances, we shall be able to discern clearly that the revolution was neither produced by the abilities or intrigues of a few individuals; nor was the effect of sudden and short-lived enthusiasm; but the natural consequence of intellectual improvement, gradually proceeding to perfection

in

in the advancement of communities, from a state of barbarism to that of polished society, till now arrived at the point when sincerity of principles seems to be hastening the overthrow of the tremendous empire of superstition and hypocrisy, erected upon the ruins of gothic brutality and ignorance.

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