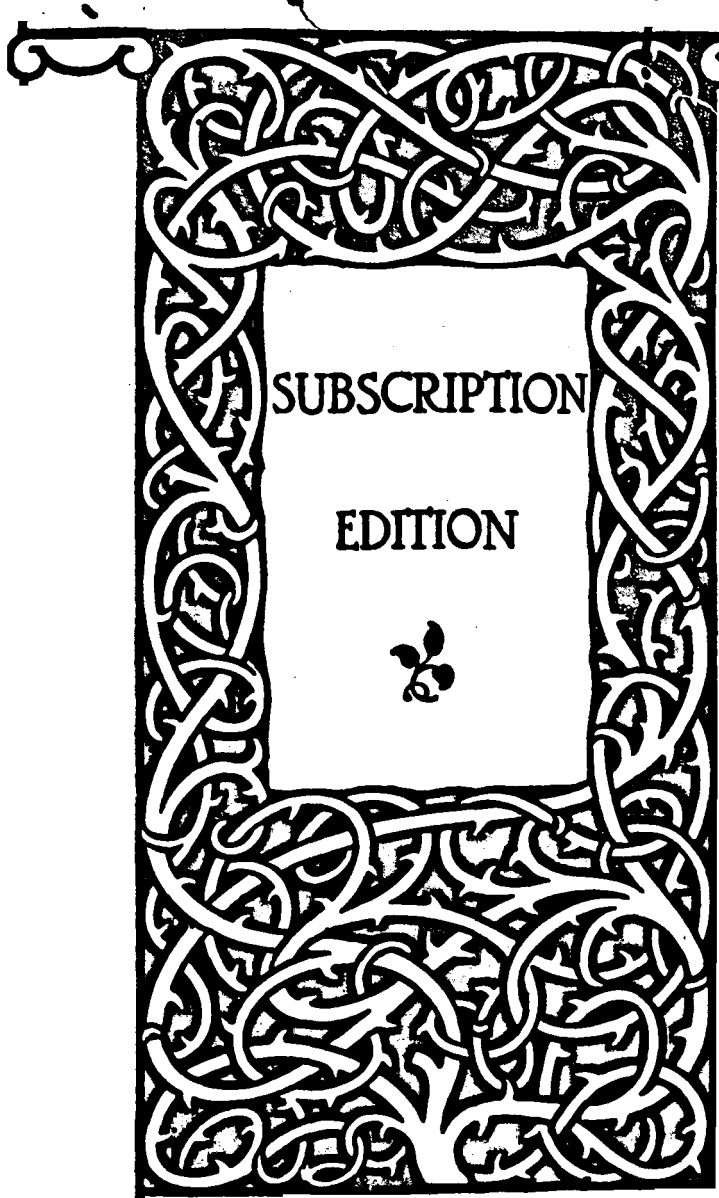


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THE BASTILLE.

MODERN FRANCE

1789—1895

BY

ANDRÉ LEBON

MEMBER OF THE CHAMBER OF DEPUTIES

London

T. FISHER UNWIN
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INTRODUCTION.

THERE is some difficulty in compressing into one volume the history of a century so rich in ideas, in events and in men as the present period has been in France. Such an effort at reduction necessitates the elimination of all that is picturesque in the facts to be related, leaving only their substance, and all attempt at giving any portrait of the personages whose acts are narrated in their results alone.

It has struck me, however, that even so brief a summary may not be useless, since the principal characteristics of our century, which are now to be found scattered throughout various special histories, when brought together and united may furnish to the reader their own peculiar contingent of instruction.

I shall not dwell on the nature of this instruction, but prefer to leave the facts to speak for themselves, rather than to suggest reflections which might be attributed to party-spirit.

I owe to the reader also a few words on the method which I have endeavoured to follow, as well as on the general conception of the work.

My method, if somewhat unusual, is at any rate of an extreme simplicity, since it consists in relating accomplished facts, and seeking their origin not in the circumstances which render them difficult of comprehension, but in those which make them explicable. That is to say, where a political system has failed, I have tried to show its obvious defects and not its hidden virtues.

As to my conception of the book, it was imposed upon me by the subject itself. After the formidable outbreak of the French Revolution and the events of the French Empire, civil equality triumphed, but all problems connected with the political organisation of the country, with public liberty and the advent of democracy, remained unsolved, and while the first phase ran its course, power was centred in a propertied middle class extremely restricted in number. This phase ended in two revolutions—the Revolution of 1830, which the middle class itself got up in order to break the power of royalty; and that of 1848, promoted by the Democracy against the middle class, which had shown itself too inert and too shortsighted to extend the suffrage in proper time.

From 1848 to 1870 there lasted a second phase, during which the electorate, now recruited by universal suffrage and master all at once of the situation, chose to abdicate its functions in favour of a dictator rather than see its sovereignty called in question by the old political parties. And once again liberty was the sufferer. It had failed to secure the progressive development of parliamentary institutions,

and was thrust aside in order that popular Right which is political equality, might proclaim its power unmistakably.

After the ruin and the shame of the Second Empire equality still subsisted and liberty returned. France is at present engaged on the task of finding a *modus vivendi* for both which shall contribute to the progress of democracy. The undertaking is all the more difficult that the instruction of the people, which ought to have preceded the change, has lagged slowly after it, so that the nation's initiation into normal conditions of political life was not made either under the repression from which the previous generation suffered, nor during the struggle for existence imposed upon the Republic by the National Assembly and later in 1889 and 1893.

The author would be glad if these pages might prove to those who read them that it is not by flying from one excess to another that a great people can achieve freedom and occupy a becoming place in the world.

PARIS, 1897.



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