

GERMANY AND THE FRENCH REVOLUTION

BY THE SAME AUTHOR

HISTORY AND HISTORIANS
IN THE 19TH CENTURY.

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BY

G. P. GOOCH

AUTHOR OF 'HISTORY AND HISTORIANS IN THE
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PREFACE

WHILE the political history of the era of the French Revolution has been written by Sybel and Sorel and a crowd of lesser men, the influence of its ideas and of the moving drama of blood and tears on the mind and soul of the different countries of Europe has never been thoroughly explored. The universal significance of the upheaval was grasped at the outset both by actors and spectators. 'Your laws will be the laws of Europe, if you are worthy of them,' declared Mirabeau to the Constituent Assembly; 'so strong is the influence of great States, and, above all, of France.' 'Whoever regards this Revolution as exclusively French,' echoed Mallet du Pan, 'is incapable of pronouncing judgment upon it.' Friends and foes beyond the frontiers were at one in emphasising the power of its appeal; and men like Burke and Paine, Kant and de Maistre, who agreed in nothing else, were convinced that the problems which it raised concerned humanity as a whole. 'When France has a cold,' remarked Metternich bitterly, 'all Europe sneezes.' The verdict of contemporaries has been ratified by succeeding generations, and has now become an established commonplace.

The object of this book is to measure the repercussion of the French Revolution on the mind of Germany. The story of diplomacy and war in the closing decade of the eighteenth century has been told with ever-increasing knowledge by two generations of historians; and the atmospheric difference between the heated polemics of Häusser and the cool serenity of Heigel registers a welcome advance in the arts of interpretation. But no panoramic survey of the intellectual ferment has been attempted. It is scarcely necessary to remark that this chapter of German history, like every other, has been the theme of innumerable monographs; and to some learned specialists a synthetic treatment may appear to be premature. But the attempt is, at any rate, worth making; for few periods in the spiritual life of the modern world compare in interest with the Augustan Age of German literature, adorned

with the names of Goethe and Schiller, Wieland and Herder, Klopstock and the Romantics, Gentz and Humboldt, Kant and Fichte. To the friendly eyes of Madame de Staël Germany was a nation of thinkers and poets; and no one will contest the assertion of Chuquet, to whose writings every student of the period is deeply indebted, that of all Germans who used the pen there was not one whose works do not bear the mark of the Revolution. This rich field has been too little explored by British scholars, and large tracts of it are virtually unknown outside Germany. For this reason I have allowed my authors, as far as possible, to express their opinions in their own words. For most of the renderings of German poetry I am indebted to the kindness of Miss Dorothy Henkel.

While the main theme of the volume is the analysis of opinion, I have endeavoured in the later chapters to explain the influence of the cataclysm on the institutions of the Holy Roman Empire and on the internal development of the more important units of which it was composed. The earthquake in France was followed by a tidal wave, which swept away a mass of antiquated rubbish in the Rhineland and Central Europe, and cleared the ground for a limited number of States of tolerable size, governed on modern lines. The renaissance of Prussia falls outside my chronological limits; but I have briefly indicated the debt of the leading reformers to the principles and precedents of revolutionary France. Some illustrative passages have been taken from the dispatches of British Ministers at various German Courts, preserved in the Record Office; and it is scarcely necessary to add that the pleasure of working in the national archives has been enhanced by the ready kindness of Mr. Hubert Hall.

G. P. G.

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