

THE DEVELOPMENT OF MODERN FRANCE (1870-1939)

by

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DEDICATED
to
THE MAYOR AND COUNCILLORS
of
LA ROCHE BLANCHE (PUY DE DÔME)
by
AN HONORARY CITIZEN OF THE COMMUNE

*Ne placet Damnedeu ne ses angles
Que ja pur mei perdet sa valur France.*

PREFACE

THE object of this book is to provide an account of modern French history from the fall of the Second Empire to the outbreak of the present war. It is designed for the general public. As the history of the Third Republic has only recently begun to be studied in a scholarly fashion, many important questions are still unsettled and it has been necessary to omit discussion of the evidence for the views taken here and to drop any apparatus of notes or bibliography. As the story approaches the present day, the traps in the way of the narrator increase in number and in complexity. The writing of very recent history must involve the use of materials which it is almost impossible to control. I have tried to reduce to a minimum the amount of guess-work at the cost of reducing to a mere narrative a very complex story. The last year has, indeed, been sketched only in the baldest outline. It should be said, however, that all of this book was planned and nearly all of it written before the outbreak of the present war. I have not attempted to alter the judgments passed on individuals and events in deference to any supposed need for reducing modern history in war-time to the level of a royal biography. It should be said, too, that the account of the origin of the last war, of the conduct of the last war, and of the nature of the peace settlement was largely written and entirely planned some years ago. The views here expressed on German diplomacy, military methods and geo-political position were formed long before the last reputable friends of the Third Reich were silenced by the event.

There is one feature of the plan of this book which, even apart from the faults in execution, may be adversely criticized. For here the 'development' of France is described only in its community aspects. There is what will seem to many an old-fashioned emphasis on political history. That the result is a distorted and unjust picture of modern France will be at once admitted. At no time since the reign of Louis XIV has the genius of individual Frenchmen and Frenchwomen been more brilliantly displayed, or in a greater variety of fields, than in this period. A history of modern France which finds space for the Duc de Broglie, historian and politician, but not for his grandson, the great physicist; for Calmette the journalist and not for his brother, the great pathologist; for Raymond Poincaré and not for his cousin, Henri Poincaré, the great mathematician: which has room for Zola

PREFACE

but not for his school-fellow Cézanne, for Senator Antonin Proust and not for his kinsman Marcel, obviously cannot pretend to give anything like a complete picture of French activity in this period. Pasteur, Debussy, Degas, Pierre Curie, Mallarmé, Bergson, the two Charcots, Alexis Carrel, André Citroën, Blériot, Père de Foucauld, Saint Theresa of Lisieux, Madame de Noailles, Sarah Bernhardt, Gaston Paris, Littré, Le Corbusier, a handful of names taken almost at random reveals the variety of talents or of genius that modern France has bred or provided a home for. But to assess the importance of these leaders in so many fields is beyond my knowledge and abilities, and I have chosen to ignore those brilliant but private careers, and concentrate on the institutions and events affecting the political unit called France, a unit much more easy to describe than the indefinable thing called 'French civilization'.

Whatever merits this book may have it owes largely to the many Frenchmen and Frenchwomen of all classes who have submitted to questioning, who have helped to form the picture which has grown up in my mind of the recent past of the nation to which our Western civilization owes most. Of that Western civilization (of which with all its faults we are unescapably the children) France has been, since the time of the *Chanson de Roland*, the main sword and the main shield. So it is to-day.

Note. I have not attempted to preserve French capitalization in proper names of persons or of institutions. In English the oddity outweighs the attractions of pedantic accuracy.

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BOOK I
THE BIRTH OF THE REPUBLIC

Fluctuat nec mergitur.

Motto of Paris.

BOOK I

THE BIRTH OF THE REPUBLIC

Original text in italics

Notes of Page

CHAPTER I

THE FALL OF AN EMPIRE

I

IN December 1848, ten months after the revolution that had expelled the junior line of the House of Bourbon from the French throne, Louis Napoleon Bonaparte, nephew of Napoleon I and grandson of Josephine, was elected President of the Second French Republic by an overwhelming majority. Three years later by the *coup d'état* of December 2nd, 1851, he dissolved Parliament by armed force and made himself a dictator, a drastic solution of the problem of his relations with the Assembly that the French people, in a plebiscite, overwhelmingly ratified. A year later, another plebiscite ratified the assumption of the imperial crown under the title of Napoleon III. The new Emperor was detested by the adherents of the fallen legitimate monarchy of the elder line of the Bourbons, by the adherents of the constitutional monarchy of the younger line, by the devotees of the Republic. In this band of opponents were some of the greatest names in contemporary France: Victor Hugo, the greatest living poet, who remained in obstinate exile; Adolphe Thiers, the most famous of French historians, who was also one of the most famous of French politicians; Alexis de Tocqueville, theorist and practitioner of popular government, and a host of others. But the French peasant and the French shopkeeper of the small town, as well as many in all classes in the great cities, were indifferent to the vitriolic poetry of Victor Hugo or the dignified hostility of M. Thiers. The new Emperor (who had promised peace) gave two great wars, neither very popular but both successfully glorious; he made an ally of England and humiliated Russia and Austria. He was the chief maker of united Italy and patron of revived Rumania. Paris was modernized and made more splendid if not more beautiful. It became the pleasure capital of the world; and rapid economic development made it one of the business capitals, too. The Imperial Court, if sometimes vulgar, was magnificent in a fashion unknown in London, Vienna, or St. Petersburg. The Empress, the beautiful Spaniard, Eugénie de Montijo, set the fashions in ladies' dress, as her husband did in politics. There was an heir, an attractive boy, and, though opposition grew in France, it was deeply divided,

ranging as it did from the great Royalist lawyer, Berryer, to such dangerous demagogues as the young Republican advocate, Gambetta, whose manners, morals and political principles terrified the right-minded.

By 1870, the Emperor was getting old and was already ill. He had been compelled to withdraw the French troops who were trying to set up the Archduke Maximilian on the throne of Mexico. His brilliant protégé, Herr von Bismarck of Prussia, had, under imperial patronage, attacked Austria, and when the 'Six Weeks' War' was over, the Prussian Prime Minister not only turned himself into Chancellor of a North German Confederation without asking Napoleon's leave, he refused to give any compensation for thus upsetting the balance of power. When in 1867 the King of Holland was prepared to sell his Grand Duchy of Luxemburg to France, Bismarck vetoed the sale. It was a great blow, and by the standards of that age had to be revenged, but Napoleon III was weary, and when the Opposition won a great many seats at the general election of 1869, he took the last steps in a long-drawn-out process. He resigned himself to the position of a constitutional monarch like Queen Victoria and accepted as Prime Minister, Émile Ollivier.

The willingness of M. Ollivier to serve Napoleon III and the willingness of Napoleon III to be served by him did them both credit, for not only had M. Ollivier been a leader of the Opposition, but his father had been arrested by the Emperor's police when Napoleon was seizing dictatorial power in 1851. The more violent members of the Opposition denounced Ollivier as a traitor, but he was approved of by M. Thiers and the sight of a former Republican in the uniform of a Minister of the Empire was not without its lesson for practical politicians. Of course, there was violent Socialism rampant among the Paris workers and in the great steel works of the President of the Corps Législatif at Le Creusot. But an attempted revolution, provoked by the killing of a journalist by a ne'er-do-well cousin of the Emperor, failed miserably, despite the provocation to revolt of the nobleman who, dropping all his titles, had become the most popular journalist of the Paris working-men. It would take a great deal more than the eloquence of Maître Gambetta, the pen of Henri Rochefort, or the conspiratorial gangs of Auguste Blanqui to overthrow a power so strongly based on a strong army, a resolute police force and popular acquiescence.

The Emperor had asked the people of France to express approval or disapproval of the move towards liberal institutions. The plebiscite was violently attacked and the Opposition did their best to show that the country was not taken in by this trick. The result was more gratifying than the Emperor dared hope and far worse than the Opposition had feared. Over seven million Frenchmen approved of the imperial régime in its new dress, while the number of opponents was only a little

greater than in 1851 and 1852. The million and a half of irreconcilables were helpless in face of this vote. The Emperor had a new grant of authority. The Opposition clung to the crumb of comfort that over 50,000 soldiers had voted 'no' and other Frenchmen were puzzled that only 350,000 soldiers voted in all. Where were the remaining 150,000 that were assumed to be in the most formidable army in the world? But these critics and these wondering statisticians could not hide from themselves that the Second Empire, eighteen years after its violent birth, seemed to have undergone a new birth of freedom, and that government of the people, by the people, for the people, in a republican form at least, was far enough off in France, if France was to have the last word in her own destiny. The plebiscite was France's Sadowa, Ollivier had declared, and it was also an indication that the French Government realized that peace had her victories no less renowned than war, a belief whose sincerity had been shown by the decision to reduce the annual contingent of conscripts for the army by 10,000. It was a gesture towards that era of disarmament of which the Emperor dreamed.

II

On July 5th, Lord Granville, who was about to become British Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs, talked over the general situation with Hammond, the veteran Under-Secretary. The report made to the successor of Lord Clarendon was highly reassuring to him both as a Foreign Secretary and as a member of the pacific Cabinet of Mr. Gladstone. Never had the Under-Secretary known so great a lull in foreign affairs. The new Minister would not, as far as could be seen, have any important business to deal with. That evening Granville, like the rest of the world, learned that a diplomatic mine had been exploded; and although it was not quite certain who had laid it, there was no doubt what country and Government was shaken by the explosion. Prince Leopold of Hohenzollern-Sigmaringen had accepted the offer of the vacant throne of Spain.

In 1868, Queen Isabella II had by the extravagance of her life, the looseness of her morals and the absurdity of her politics, worn out the patience of the ruling class in Spain, the generals, and she had been deposed and had gone into exile with her son.¹ Marshal Serrano and Marshal Prim, convinced that a Spanish Republic was impossible, began to look around for a prince who could be induced to mount the not very stable throne. The fall of Isabella was a blow to the policy of Napoleon III, for he had taken a kindly interest in her fortunes: and his Empress was even more involved in the politics of her native land. But even had Napoleon been completely indifferent to

¹ Later Alfonso XII, father of ex-King Alfonso XIII.

Isabella, the question of who should rule Spain was traditionally of tremendous importance to the ruler of France. The greatest danger run by France in the past had come, it was believed, from the union in one family of the thrones of Spain and of the old German Empire. Since the establishment of the Bourbons at Madrid in 1700, that danger of an enemy on the north-east and also on the south-west frontiers of France had ceased to be a nightmare. Spain had only two neighbours, Portugal and France. Of all the great powers, France alone had a natural interest in Spain and, in 1870, no Frenchman doubted these simple geographical truths. But it was learned on July 3rd that the rulers of Spain were about to propose to the Spanish Cortes (which would do as it was told) the candidacy of Prince Leopold of Hohenzollern-Sigmaringen, a member of that family which, above all others, it was to the interest of France to keep away from her back door, since the recently victorious armies of this house lay so uncomfortably close to her front door.

It is true that the young Prince was not a near kinsman of the King of Prussia, being a cadet of the elder line which had stayed at home in pleasant Swabia while the junior line sought greater fortune in the dreary plains of Brandenburg. But the senior line had been willingly absorbed by the junior, had ceded the little ancestral principality to Prussia and had been recognized as part of the Royal House. The princes were all loyal Prussians, and this much more than set off the indubitable but unimportant fact that they were more closely connected by blood and marriage with the Emperor of the French than with the King of Prussia.¹ The young Prince had some claim to being a suitable candidate for the Spanish throne. He was a Catholic, like the rest of his branch, and he had married a Portuguese princess. But although he was a cousin of the Emperor of the French and connected with the dynasty of Spain's other neighbour, he was first and last a Prussian prince. It was one thing to put his brother Charles, with the approval of Napoleon III, on the throne of Rumania,² or to offer Leopold the throne of Greece, but no French Government could look on calmly while a Prussian officer was made ruler in Madrid. This fact was perfectly well known to the two chief actors, Marshal Prim and Count von Bismarck, for though it may be doubtful when the Chancellor of the North German Confederation first took a hand in the plot, by the spring of 1870 he was one of its moving spirits.

From Bismarck's point of view, the 'Hohenzollern candidacy', as the world soon learned to call it, had everything in its favour. If all went well, if the new King were elected and France was thus presented with a *fait accompli*, Napoleon III would have to submit—or to in-

¹ The Prince had a Murat grandmother on his father's side and a Beauharnais grandmother on his mother's side.

² Leopold was the grandfather of King Carol II of Rumania.

furiate Spanish pride by denying the right of the Cortes to elect whom it chose. If he did submit, then there was a dutiful Prussian in Madrid to give the French cause to look to their southern frontier. However little King Leopold could do, it would be better than nothing when that inevitable day came, the day of reckoning between the great power of the present and the great power of the future.

The unification of North Germany under Prussia had been carried out with the benevolent assistance of Napoleon III. He believed in national unity, in the policy of 'great agglomerations'. He also expected to be in a position to impose his own terms after a long and exhausting struggle between Prussia and Austria. But in six weeks Prussia had completely defeated Austria, and France was too late to intervene. Peace was made with only the most formal participation of Napoleon III. To a simple-minded imperialist soldier like Colonel du Barail, this ignoring of the Government of the 'great nation' was impudent. And other servants of the Emperor felt the same: 'It is France that has been beaten at Sadowa,' said Marshal Randon.

The enemies of the Empire were quick to rub in this truth. Many of them, on the Left, rejoiced in the Prussian victory. Many of them agreed with what that anti-clerical Bonapartist, Edmond About, had written in 1860, that France would welcome the union of Germany under Prussia. Only 'the princes and the junkers' would not help Prussia to this high destiny. Protestant and enlightened Prussia was admired by the enemies of the Church in France. What Sainte-Beuve had called the 'vague and lyrical' view of Germany that Madame de Staël had helped to spread in France was far from dead. Even after Sadowa, George Sand had refused to believe the warning of the veteran revolutionary Barbès who wrote to her that 'it is really barbarism which is ready to throw itself on us'. Germany was the land whose scholars had freed Renan from his faith and which had inflamed the heart of young Edgar Quinet even before he knew much German. And, in any case, not only were the Germans a philosophical and anti-clerical people, they were also harmless. Parisians had seen what a small German court was like in the famous comic opera 'The Grand Duchess'. Who could be afraid of the army of Gerolstein and of General Boum? Too many people confused Gerolstein with Prussia and Count von Bismarck (a great admirer of the comic opera) with General Boum. The sense in which Germany, like the Grand Duchess, loved military men was not well understood in France.

Spain was not Gerolstein, and the sudden revelation that the elaborate preparations for putting Prince Leopold on the Spanish throne had almost been completed was too much for the temper of the French ruling classes and for their political enemies of the same education. So when on July 6th the Duc de Gramont made a strong speech to the Chamber announcing that France could not look on 'while a neighbour-

ing people obliges us to permit a foreign power, by placing one of its princes on the throne of Charles V, to disturb to our detriment the present equilibrium in Europe and to place the interests and honour of France in peril', there was general approval of his firm attitude. He was indeed only representing the views of such organs of respectable opinion as the *Temps*, and it was an organ of the partisans of divine right, the *Gazette de France*, which had first published the news. The Imperial Government, which had allowed itself to be tricked once by Bismarck, could not afford to do so twice.

The speech of the Duc de Gramont was the first of the French mistakes in the crisis. Suspecting, rightly but without proofs that could be made public, that the Hohenzollern candidacy was a move of the Chancellor's against France, the French Government took up the challenge, anxious to make public its views and to prevent the Opposition in France from accusing it of slackness. A prudent commentator, the young Albert Sorel, pointed out that the proper move was to approach Madrid, to point out to Serrano and Prim that the candidacy was intolerable to France, and get them to withdraw the proposal. Once Prussia was directly involved, France would have to deal with a great power, not with disunited and corrupt Spain; with Bismarck, and not with the current military saviours of the Spanish people.

Bismarck's policy was simple; he wanted, if possible, to get the Prince made King of Spain. It was true the secret of the intrigue had leaked out, but the Cortès had been summoned for July 20th and whatever France was to do would have to be done quickly. If it was too late to face her with an accomplished fact, then the war which Bismarck wished for was at hand, a war in which, if all went well, Spain would be an ally and at the worst France could be given the appearance of attacking Prussia gratuitously—before the military reforms in France had produced any serious results, before France had managed to secure any allies, and before any attempt to sow discord between North and South Germany had any chance of success.

There were two obstacles to the success of this policy, the King and the Queen of Prussia. King William was old and sincerely anxious to avoid another war. His ingenious Minister had already involved him in two aggressive and glorious conflicts, and the King had been fearful when the acceptance of the Spanish crown had first been suggested. He had swallowed the casuistical explanation that his consent to the acceptance was purely the act of the head of the House of Hohenzollern and in no way involved the Prussian state, but the morsel had been hard to swallow and lay heavy on the royal stomach. The King's conscience might be aroused, and the one person likely to arouse it was Queen Augusta, who detested Bismarck, who was detested by him—and who was, alas!, on excellent terms with Count Benedetti, the French Ambassador.

The sudden explosion of the mine found its chief engineer away at his estate in Pomerania; the King was taking a cure at Ems; the Queen was close at hand at Coblenz; and Count Benedetti near the Queen at Wildbad. One other important actor was in his remote castle of Sigmaringen, an hour from any railroad. Prince Karl Anton was rejoicing in the great destiny of his son. 'Our house is at a turning-point of history,' he wrote to his daughter, Princess Marie of Belgium.¹ '... Fate is knocking at our door, our children and our children's children would not only be astonished but could also reproach us with not having asked it to come in.' Full of these grandiloquent ideas, the Prince was not likely to help King William in his dilemma, for although the King had never liked the candidacy he felt himself bound by the consent that he had given. He would be delighted if the acceptance were withdrawn, but he would not order either Prince Leopold or his father to withdraw it.

If the French Ministers had made a mistake in meeting Bismarck half-way by demanding satisfaction from Prussia, not from Spain, by making it evident that their aim was to persuade or coerce Berlin, not Madrid or Sigmaringen, they showed some sense in their choice of means. They attacked King William, first of all by impressing the danger of the situation on the Prussian ambassador, Werther, who was all the more susceptible since Bismarck had hidden the intrigue from him. Werther was worried and innocent and he was about to visit the King at Ems. And interrupting the cure of Benedetti at Wildbad, they ordered that resourceful diplomat to visit the King, with whom he was on excellent terms—and on the way Benedetti visited the Queen, with whom he was on even better terms.

The sudden storm that had sprung up alarmed all the Cabinets of Europe. Their first view was that even if the French reaction had been unnecessarily violent, the candidacy, and especially its secret negotiation, justified a stiff attitude. The Kings and Ministers were all informed of the French view, and they in turn made known their attitude to the Prussian Government, which did not care, and to the Prussian King, who did. King William was anxious and the attitude of his Queen, who saw in the crisis another example of Bismarck's diabolic arts, added to his worries. It was Werther's report of the anger shown in Paris that induced the King to make the first dangerous move, from Bismarck's point of view. King William wrote to Prince Karl Anton asking what he proposed to do in the emergency; thus re-opening the whole question and running the risk of involving Prussia, or rather Bismarck's scheme, in disaster, the disaster of a withdrawal of the candidacy in face of French pressure. The time-bomb had exploded, but it was not yet quite certain who was to be injured by its splinters.

¹ Mother of King Albert I.

From Varzin, Bismarck kept an eye on the men whose folly or wisdom, weakness or strength, could upset his admirable plans. His representative in Berlin, Herr von Thile, kept on denying any knowledge of the question. It was entirely a matter for the Hohenzollern princes to settle with the representatives of the Spanish people; it was not the business of Berlin or Paris. His agents in Ems watched the King, who soon became conscious that his imperious servant was displeased with him and yet the King was not ready to be a mere tool in his minister's hands. The German press, carefully worked by Bismarck's agents, began to show signs of irritation, but the real press storm was in Paris.

In Paris, the editors and politicians were hysterical. Prussia must not only be thwarted, she must appear to be thwarted. The impudent comedy of pretending that Bismarck was outside the whole affair must be shown up. The Government was under constant pressure to be strong, firm, noisy. After its first blunder, it was not given time to recover. It had before it the demand of *Le Public* that, as Prim had behaved like a Spaniard and Bismarck like a Prussian, 'we must know whether Messrs. Ollivier and de Gramont have behaved like Frenchmen'. That clever weathercock, Edmond About, was now convinced that the honour of France was at stake, and it became clear that only war would satisfy him. An even more representative journalist, Émile de Girardin, in the next week did all in his power to make war certain.

The Emperor, it is true, wanted peace. He told the representative of the King of Italy that if the candidacy was withdrawn, no matter how, France would be satisfied. Ollivier was for peace, if not at any price, at any price that gave France the substance of her demands. The reports of the Prefects showed how far the provinces were from sharing the hysteria of Paris, or of that part of Paris which was represented in newspaper offices and on the smart streets. War would be accepted if necessary, but the necessity had to be proved to the peasants and small traders, who had three times voted for the Emperor because he promised peace at home and abroad. M. Thiers, whose reputation as a prophet had been made by his gloomy but accurate prophecies of what the brilliant foreign policy of the Empire involved, had warned the Chamber, over a year before, against any war with Prussia except in circumstances in which intolerable aggression would force France to fight and when she might have 'the world as witness, as friend, and perhaps as auxiliary'.

But the Chamber was not very ready to listen to reason. The Imperialist majority was discontented by the mildness and apparent weakness of Ollivier. It looked, in order to discover the Emperor's wishes, less to his Minister than to such bellicose orators as Clément Duvernois. Under such pressure, Ollivier and Gramont weakened; they had not only to thwart the Prussian plot, not only to defeat Prussia

in the eyes of the world, but to give that defeat a character which would produce a parliamentary victory. If the Cortes had been sitting, there might have been a *fait accompli*, in face of which Napoleon III might possibly have taken the advice of his cousin, Prince Napoleon, and, refusing to recognize King Leopold, let the Spanish people get rid of him. If the French Chamber had not been sitting there might have been no war, for the Cabinet and the Emperor would not have been under constant pressure. Not all the pressure came from Parliament. Napoleon was at Saint-Cloud, surrounded by courtiers, by soldiers, by ladies, and most of these were enemies of the Liberal Empire, sure that anything short of a complete diplomatic victory would weaken the Empire still further, and that a war with Prussia (which, of course, would be victorious) would ensure a peaceful end of the reign of Napoleon III and a glorious beginning for the reign of Napoleon IV. The Empress was of this school, not content with half-measures, ambitious for her son and, like a good Spanish Catholic, detesting the very word Liberal and the party of Prim.

The third man in whose hands the destiny of France lay was the Duc de Gramont. Superficially brilliant, cosmopolitan,¹ he had been a great social success as Ambassador in Vienna, and he took too seriously the anti-Prussian talk of the Austrian court circles, and too seriously his own popularity. Austria would have liked, that is to say the military party would have liked, to avenge Sadowa, but they were not ready for a risky war, and the hopes that had been based on the recent visit of the Archduke Albrecht to Paris were baseless. Even more baseless were hopes of Italian aid. France could only offer Italy one thing, the free occupation of Rome, and a Catholic ministry like Ollivier's could not promise that. Whatever King Victor Emmanuel might want to do, the Italian politicians, less perhaps than the politicians of any other nation, were disposed to let their policy be affected by mere gratitude. Thanks to the distrust aroused by the secret way in which the affair had been managed, the sympathies of Europe were at the beginning with France, and, had Gramont been competent, they could have been kept with France. But France had no allies. Even if Austrian policy had been bolder, Russia would have vetoed active intervention, and the price of Italian aid was too great. The belief that the small German states were anxious to throw off the Prussian yoke, a view held by General Ducrot, the commander of the Strasbourg garrison, was nonsense. There was some discontent in South Germany; Würtemberg especially gave Bismarck a little to worry about; but in face of France, of an aggressive France, all Germany would unite. This, indeed, was Bismarck's main calculation of benefit from a war; fighting a common enemy, North and South Germany would achieve a spiritual unity, which was still only embryonic.

¹ He married a Miss MacKinnon.