Discours sur l'histoire de la révolution d'Angleterre

Guizot M
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DISCOURS
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M. GUIZOT’S Discours, published in 1850 as an introduction to a new edition of his Histoire de la Révolution d'Angleterre, is perhaps one of the best summaries of an eventful period of English History, though not always in accordance with the views of later historians. It may, I think, be read with advantage as a schoolbook when the period of which it treats happens to be the subject for the year. In preparing the notes to this edition I have again to acknowledge my great obligations to my friends Mr Edy de Chemendy and Mr A. W. W. Dale. I am also much indebted to Mrs Austin’s excellent translation (Murray, 1850), which is always well expressed and generally correct.

February, 1894.
INTRODUCTION.

Early Life of M. Guizot.

François Pierre Guillaume Guizot was born at Nîmes in 1787. Both his parents belonged to Protestant families of good standing and tried consistency. His father, a rising barrister, was an enthusiastic supporter of the Revolution in its earlier stages, but was disgusted by the excesses of the Jacobins. He was arrested and executed in 1794. In 1799 Mme Guizot, finding the educational resources of Nîmes inadequate, removed to Geneva with her sons. There young Guizot received an excellent training. In 1805 he went to Paris to study law, and eke out his scanty resources by acting as tutor in the family of M. Stapfer and by writing for the newspapers. He had the good fortune in 1809 to attract the notice of the foremost man of letters of the time, M. de Chateaubriand, by a review of Les Martyrs. Two or three years later he published a translation of Gibbon's Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire, with notes which still find a place in the best English editions. In 1812 he married Mlle de Meulan, a lady of considerable literary reputation, who was some fourteen years his senior. In the same year he was appointed by M. de Fontanes, Grand Master

1 Compiled from Mr Reeve’s article on Guizot in the Encyclopædia Britannica, Mme de Witt’s M. Guizot dans sa famille, Mill’s Dissertations and Discussions, Ste-Beuve’s essays in Causseries du Lundi I. and Nouveaux Lundis I., and Gidel’s Littérature Française.
of the University, the friend of Chateaubriand, and himself a poet, to the newly established chair of modern history at the Sorbonne. Even at this early age—he was only 25—he gave proof of his independence of character. Fontanes almost ordered him to insert in his inaugural lecture the customary panegyric on the Emperor. “Non, je ne le ferai pas,” replied Guizot, “reprenez la chaire que vous m’avez donnée ; je n’aime pas l’empereur, je ne le louerai pas.” Fontanes, who was a good-natured man, eventually gave in, remarking “Comme ces protestants sont entêtés ; je m’en tirerai comme je pourrai.”

*Political career up to 1830.*

Guizot’s professorship brought him into close relations with Royer-Collard, who occupied the chair of philosophy, and who was one of the leaders of the moderate liberal party then forming. To his colleague’s influence he expresses himself deeply indebted. Both men were opposed alike to absolutism and to extreme democracy, and sought their ideal of government in a limited monarchy after the English type. It was not long before they had an opportunity of putting their views in practice. In 1814, Louis XVIII. was placed on the throne, not without being compelled to grant a charter which secured at least some liberties to his subjects. Royer-Collard came into office, and on his recommendation Guizot, then only 27, was made chief secretary to the Ministry of the Interior (Home Office). He resigned at the beginning of the Hundred Days. The liberal party made overtures to Louis, who had taken refuge at Ghent, and Guizot was deputed to press upon him the necessity of frankly adopting a constitutional policy in the event of his return. The Second Restoration (1815) replaced him in office for a short time as secretary to the Ministry of Justice. In 1819 he returned to the Ministry of the Interior under the short-lived Liberal administration of Duc Decazes. It was not till 1830 that he entered the Chamber as representative of Lisieux. It was a critical moment; the Polignac
ministry had just entered on the fatal policy of repression which soon brought about the July Revolution.

The Doctrinaires.

Throughout the Restoration period, Guizot was an important member of a group of eminent men who laboured hard to keep in check the absolutist tendencies of the restored monarchy and to make the charter of Louis XVIII. a reality. The party, of which the leader was Royer-Collard, and which included the Duc de Broglie, Duc Decazes, M. Villemain, M. Duverger de Hauranne, and other men of high character and attainments, were known as the doctrinaires. The name was originally fastened upon Royer-Collard by a French newspaper published in Belgium, Le nain jaune réfugié, and was not unreasonably applied to the advocates of a well-matured, but somewhat rigid system of political dogma. Their cardinal doctrine was that of the juste milieu, the reconciliation of the traditional monarchy with some, at least, of the ideas of modern liberalism. "Adhering," says Mr Reeve, "to the great principles of liberty and toleration, they were sternly opposed to the anarchical traditions of the Revolution. They knew that the elements of anarchy were still subsisting in the country; these they hoped to subdue, not by reactionary measures, but by the firm application of the power of a limited monarchy, based on the suffrages of the middle class and defended by the highest literary talent of the times. Their motives were honourable. Their views were philosophical. But they were opposed alike to the democratical spirit of the age, to the military traditions of the empire, and to the bigotry and absolutism of the court. The fate of such a party might be foreseen. They lived by a policy of resistance; they perished by another revolution. They are remembered more for their constant resistance to popular demands than by the services they undoubtedly rendered to temperate freedom."
INTRODUCTION.

**Literary activity from 1812 to 1830.**

Guizot’s efforts as a leader of the *doctrinaires* by no means occupied all his time and thought. His studies and lectures as a professor of history during this period were of the utmost value. He lectured on the history of representative government, and published a voluminous series of memoirs bearing on the histories of France and of England. But his great work, obviously suggested by his study of Gibbon, was to trace the general principles and laws under which modern society had been developed out of the ruins of the Roman Empire. Some of his earlier lectures, delivered before his professorship was suppressed by the reactionary government, are embodied in his *Essays on the History of France*; his maturer thoughts were given to the world in the brilliant discourses of 1828, 1829 and 1830, published under the title of the *History of Civilization in Europe* and the *History of Civilization in France*. No doubt he was influenced by the reaction against the clean sweep of the past made by the Revolution, which led Chateaubriand and after him the Romanticists to the study of the Middle Ages, and he was anxious to bring out in the history of France that continuity which is so conspicuous in the history of England. But what gives the greatest value to his work is the systematizing tendency which prefers the high-roads of history to its by-paths, and which seeks everywhere the solution of historical problems rather in the operation of general laws than in isolated events and the influence of individual actors. He was, in fact, one of the founders of modern philosophical history. Another work of this period, still more closely connected with his political aims, was his *History of the English Revolution*, published in 1826, while his professorship was in abeyance. His Calvinistic training had especially fitted him to sympathize with the English Puritans, and his enthusiasm for the *juste*

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1 A full examination of these works will be found in J. S. Mill’s *Dissertations and Discussions*, Vol. II.