

***CHARLOTTE  
BIGGS***

***A RESIDENCE  
IN FRANCE  
DURING  
THE YEARS  
1792, 1793,  
1794 AND 1795,  
COMPLETE***

**Charlotte Biggs**

# **A Residence in France During the Years 1792, 1793, 1794 and 1795, Complete**

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# PRELIMINARY REMARKS BY THE EDITOR.

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The following Letters were submitted to my inspection and judgement by the Author, of whose principles and abilities I had reason to entertain a very high opinion. How far my judgement has been exercised to advantage in enforcing the propriety of introducing them to the public, that public must decide. To me, I confess, it appeared, that a series of important facts, tending to throw a strong light on the internal state of France, during the most important period of the Revolution, could neither prove uninteresting to the general reader, nor indifferent to the future historian of that momentous epoch; and I conceived, that the opposite and judicious reflections of a well-formed and well-cultivated mind, naturally arising out of events within the immediate scope of its own observation, could not in the smallest degree diminish the interest which, in my apprehension, they are calculated to excite. My advice upon this occasion was farther influenced by another consideration. Having traced, with minute attention, the progress of the revolution, and the conduct of its advocates, I had remarked the extreme assiduity employed (as well by translations of the most violent productions of the Gallic press, as by original compositions,) to introduce and propagate, in foreign countries, those pernicious principles which have already sapped the foundation of social order, destroyed the happiness of millions, and spread desolation and ruin over the finest country in Europe. I had particularly

observed the incredible efforts exerted in England, and, I am sorry to say, with too much success, for the base purpose of giving a false colour to every action of the persons exercising the powers of government in France; and I had marked, with indignation, the atrocious attempt to strip vice of its deformity, to dress crime in the garb of virtue, to decorate slavery with the symbols of freedom, and give to folly the attributes of wisdom. I had seen, with extreme concern, men, whom the lenity, mistaken lenity, I must call it, of our government had rescued from punishment, if not from ruin, busily engaged in this scandalous traffic, and, availing themselves of their extensive connections to diffuse, by an infinite variety of channels, the poison of democracy over their native land. In short, I had seen the British press, the grand palladium of British liberty, devoted to the cause of Gallic licentiousness, that mortal enemy of all freedom, and even the pure stream of British criticism diverted from its natural course, and polluted by the pestilential vapours of Gallic republicanism. I therefore deemed it essential, by an exhibition of well-authenticated facts, to correct, as far as might be, the evil effects of misrepresentation and error, and to defend the empire of truth, which had been assailed by a host of foes.

My opinion of the principles on which the present system of government in France was founded, and the war to which those principles gave rise, have been long since submitted to the public. Subsequent events, far from invalidating, have strongly confirmed it. In all the public declarations of the Directory, in their domestic polity, in their conduct to foreign powers, I plainly trace the prevalence of the same principles,

the same contempt for the rights and happiness of the people, the same spirit of aggression and aggrandizement, the same eagerness to overturn the existing institutions of neighbouring states, and the same desire to promote "the universal revolution of Europe," which marked the conduct of BRISSOT, LE BRUN, DESMOULINS, ROBESPIERRE, and their disciples. Indeed, what stronger instance need be adduced of the continued prevalence of these principles, than the promotion to the supreme rank in the state, of two men who took an active part in the most atrocious proceedings of the Convention at the close of 1792, and at the commencement of the following year?

In all the various constitutions which have been successively adopted in that devoted country, the welfare of the people has been wholly disregarded, and while they have been amused with the shadow of liberty, they have been cruelly deprived of the substance. Even on the establishment of the present constitution, the one which bore the nearest resemblance to a rational system, the freedom of election, which had been frequently proclaimed as the very cornerstone of liberty, was shamefully violated by the legislative body, who, in their eagerness to perpetuate their own power, did not scruple to destroy the principle on which it was founded. Nor is this the only violation of their own principles. A French writer has aptly observed, that "En révolution comme en morale, ce n'est que le premier pas qui coûte:" thus the executive, in imitation of the legislative body, seem disposed to render their power perpetual. For though it be expressly declared by the 137th article of the 6th title of their present constitutional code, that the



"Directory shall be partially renewed by the election of a new member every year," no step towards such election has been taken, although the time prescribed by the law is elapsed.—In a private letter from Paris now before me, written within these few days, is the following observation on this very circumstance: "The constitution has received another blow. The month of Vendemiaire is past, and our Directors still remain the same. Hence we begin to drop the appellation of Directory, and substitute that of the Cinqvir, who are more to be dreaded for their power, and more to be detested for their crimes, than the Decemvir of ancient Rome." The same letter also contains a brief abstract of the state of the metropolis of the French republic, which is wonderfully characteristic of the attention of the government to the welfare and happiness of its inhabitants!

"The reign of misery and of crime seems to be perpetuated in this distracted capital: suicides, pillage, and assassinations, are daily committed, and are still suffered to pass unnoticed. But what renders our situation still more deplorable, is the existence of an innumerable band of spies, who infect all public places, and all private societies. More than a hundred thousand of these men are registered on the books of the modern SARTINE; and as the population of Paris, at most, does not exceed six hundred thousand souls, we are sure to find in six individuals one spy. This consideration makes me shudder, and, accordingly, all confidence, and all the sweets of social intercourse, are banished from among us. People salute each other, look at each other, betray mutual suspicions, observe a profound silence, and part. This, in few words, is an exact description

of our modern republican parties. It is said, that poverty has compelled many respectable persons, and even state-creditors, to enlist under the standard of COCHON, (the Police Minister,) because such is the honourable conduct of our sovereigns, that they pay their spies in specie—and their soldiers, and the creditors of the state, in paper.—Such is the morality, such the justice, such are the republican virtues, so loudly vaunted by our good and dearest friends, our pensioners—the Gazetteers of England and Germany!"

There is not a single abuse, which the modern reformers reprobated so loudly under the ancient system, that is not magnified, in an infinite degree, under the present establishment. For one Lettre de Cachet issued during the mild reign of LOUIS the Sixteenth, a thousand Mandats d'Arret have been granted by the tyrannical demagogues of the revolution; for one Bastille which existed under the Monarchy, a thousand Maisons de Detention have been established by the Republic. In short, crimes of every denomination, and acts of tyranny and injustice, of every kind, have multiplied, since the abolition of royalty, in a proportion which sets all the powers of calculation at defiance.

It is scarcely possible to notice the present situation of France, without adverting to the circumstances of the WAR, and to the attempt now making, through the medium of negotiation, to bring it to a speedy conclusion. Since the publication of my Letter to a Noble Earl, now destined to chew the cud of disappointment in the vale of obscurity, I have been astonished to hear the same assertions advance, by the members and advocates of that party whose merit is

faid to confift in the violence of their oppofition to the meafures of government, on the origin of the war, which had experienced the moft ample confutation, without the affiftance of any additional reafon, and without the fmalleft attempt to expofe the invalidity of thofe proofs which, in my conception, amounted nearly to mathematical demonftration, and which I had dared them, in terms the moft pointed, to invalidate. The queftion of aggreffion before ftood on fuch high ground, that I had not the prefumption to fuppofe it could derive an acceffion of ftrength from any arguments which I could fupply; but I was confident, that the authentic documents which I offered to the public would remove every intervening object that tended to obftruct the fight of inattentive obfervers, and reflect on it fuch an additional light as would flafh infant conviction on the minds of all. It feems, I have been deceived; but I muft be permitted to fuggeft, that men who perfift in the renewal of affertions, without a fingle effort to controvert the proofs which have been adduced to demonftrate their fallacy, cannot have for their object the eftablifhment of truth—which ought, exclufively, to influence the conduct of public characters, whether writers or orators.

With regard to the negotiation, I can derive not the fmalleft hopes of fuccefs from a contemplation of the paff conduct, or of the prefent principles, of the government of France. When I compare the projects of aggrandizement openly avowed by the French rulers, previous to the declaration of war againft this country, with the exorbitant pretenfions advanced in the arrogant reply of the Executive Directory to the note prefented by the Britifh Envoy at Bafil

in the month of February, 1796, and with the more recent observations contained in their official note of the 19th of September last, I cannot think it probable that they will accede to any terms of peace that are compatible with the interest and safety of the Allies. Their object is not so much the establishment of the extension of their republic.

As to the danger to be incurred by a treaty of peace with the republic of France, though it has been considerably diminished by the events of the war, it is still unquestionably great. This danger principally arises from a pertinacious adherence, on the part of the Directory, to those very principles which were adopted by the original promoters of the abolition of Monarchy in France. No greater proof of such adherence need be required than their refusal to repeal those obnoxious decrees (passed in the months of November and December, 1792,) which created so general and so just an alarm throughout Europe, and which excited the reprobation even of that party in England, which was willing to admit the equivocal interpretation given to them by the Executive Council of the day. I proved, in the Letter to a Noble Earl before alluded to, from the very testimony of the members of that Council themselves, as exhibited in their official instructions to one of their confidential agents, that the interpretation which they had assigned to those decrees, in their communications with the British Ministry, was a base interpretation, and that they really intended to enforce the decrees, to the utmost extent of their possible operation, and, by a literal construction thereof, to encourage rebellion in every state, within the reach of their arms or their principles. Nor have the present government merely

forborne to repeal those destructive laws—they have imitated the conduct of their predecessors, have actually put them in execution wherever they had the ability to do so, and have, in all respects, as far as related to those decrees, adopted the precise spirit and principles of the faction which declared war against England. Let any man read the instructions of the Executive Council to PUBLICOLA CHAUSSARD, their Commissary in the Netherlands, in 1792 and 1793, and an account of the proceedings in the Low Countries consequent thereon, and then examine the conduct of the republican General, BUNAPARTE, in Italy—who must necessarily act from the instructions of the Executive Directory—and he will be compelled to acknowledge the justice of my remark, and to admit that the latter actuated by the same pernicious desire to overturn the settled order of society, which invariably marked the conduct of the former.

"It is an acknowledged fact, that every revolution requires a provisional power to regulate its disorganizing movements, and to direct the methodical demolition of every part of the ancient social constitution.— Such ought to be the revolutionary power.

"To whom can such power belong, but to the French, in those countries into which they may carry their arms? Can they with safety suffer it to be exercised by any other persons? It becomes the French republic, then, to assume this kind of guardianship over the people whom she awakens to Liberty!\*"

*\* Considerations Generales sur l'Esprit et les Principes du Decret du 15 Decembre.*

Such were the Lacedaemonian principles avowed by the French government in 1792, and such is the Lacedaimonian policy\* pursued by the French government in 1796! It cannot then, I conceive, be contended, that a treaty with a government still professing principles which have been repeatedly proved to be subversive of all social order, which have been acknowledged by their parents to have for their object the methodical demolition of existing constitutions, can be concluded without danger or risk. That danger, I admit, is greatly diminished, because the power which was destined to carry into execution those gigantic projects which constituted its object, has, by the operations of the war, been considerably curtailed. They well may exist in equal force, but the ability is no longer the same.

MACHIAVEL justly observes, that it was the narrow policy of the Lacedaemonians always to destroy the ancient constitution, and establish their own form of government, in the counties and cities which they subdued.

But though I maintain the existence of danger in a Treaty with the Republic of France, unless she previously repeal the decrees to which I have adverted, and abrogate the acts to which they have given birth, I by no means contend that it exists in such a degree as to justify a determination, on the part of the British government, to make its removal the sine qua non of negotiation, or peace. Greatly as I admire the brilliant endowments of Mr. BURKE, and highly as I respect and esteem him for the manly and decisive part which he has taken, in opposition to the destructive anarchy of republican France, and in defence of the constitutional freedom of Britain; I cannot either agree with him on this

point, or concur with him in the idea that the reftoration of the Monarchy of France was ever the object of the war. That the Britifh Minifters ardently defired that event, and were earneft in their endeavours to promote it, is certain; not becaufe it was the object of the war, but becaufe they confidered it as the beft means of promoting the object of the war, which was, and is, the eftablifhment of the fafety and tranquillity of Europe, on a folid and permanent bafis. If that object can be attained, and the republic exift, there is nothing in the paff conduct and profeffions of the Britifh Minifters, that can interpoze an obftacle to the conclufion of peace. Indeed, in my apprehenfion, it would be highly impolitic in any Minifter, at the commencement of a war, to advance any fpecific object, that attainment of which fhould be declared to be the fine qua non of peace. If mortals could arrogate to themfelves the attributes of the Deity, if they could direct the courfe of events, and controul the chances of war, fuch conduct would be juftifiable; but on no other principle, I think, can its defence be undertaken. It is, I grant, much to be lamented, that the protection offered to the friends of monarchy in France, by the declaration of the 29th of October, 1793, could not be rendered effectual: as far as the offer went it was certainly obligatory on the party who made it; but it was merely conditional—reftriated, as all fimilar offers neceffarily muft be, by the ability to fulfil the obligation incurred.

In paying this tribute to truth, it is not my intention to retract, in the fmalleft degree, the opinion I have ever profeffed, that the reftoration of the ancient monarchy of France would be the beft poffible means not only of fecuring

the different states of Europe from the dangers of republican anarchy, but of promoting the real interests, welfare, and happiness of the French people themselves. The reasons on which this opinion is founded I have long since explained; and the intelligence which I have since received from France, at different times, has convinced me that a very great proportion of her inhabitants concur in the sentiment.

The miseries resulting from the establishment of a republican system of government have been severely felt, and deeply deplored; and I am fully persuaded, that the subjects and tributaries of France will cordially subscribe to the following observation on republican freedom, advanced by a writer who had deeply studied the genius of republics: *"Di tutte le ferveiture dure, quella e durissima, che ti sottomette ad una repubblica; l'una, perche e la piu durabile, e manco si puo sperarne d'ufare: L'altra perche il fine della repubblica e enervare ed indebolire, debolire, per accrescere il corpo suo, tutti gli altri corpi.\*"*

JOHN GIFFORD. London, Nov. 12, 1796.

\* *Difcorfi di Nicoli Machiavelli*, Lib. ii. p. 88.

P.S. Since I wrote the preceding remarks, I have been given to understand, that by a decree, subsequent to the completion of the constitutional code, the first partial renewal of the Executive Directory was deferred till the month of March, 1799; and that, therefore, in this instance, the present Directory cannot be accused of having violated the constitution. But the guilt is only to be transferred from the Directory to the Convention, who passed that decree, as well as some others, in contradiction to a positive



constitutional law.——Indeed, the Directory themselves betrayed no greater delicacy with regard to the observance of the constitution, or M. BARRAS would never have taken his seat among them; for the constitution expressly says, (and this positive provision was not even modified by any subsequent mandate of the Convention,) that no man shall be elected a member of the Directory who has not completed his fortieth year—whereas it is notorious that Barras had not this requisite qualification, having been born in the year 1758!

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I avail myself of the opportunity afforded me by the publication of a Second Edition to notice some insinuations which have been thrown out, tending to question the authenticity of the work. The motives which have induced the author to withhold from these Letters the sanction of her name, relate not to herself, but to some friends still remaining in France, whose safety she justly conceives might be affected by the disclosure. Acceding to the force and propriety of these motives, yet aware of the suspicions to which a recital of important facts, by an anonymous writer, would naturally be exposed, and sensible, also, that a certain description of critics would gladly avail themselves of any opportunity for discouraging the circulation of a work which contained principles hostile to their own; I determined to prefix my name to the publication. By so doing, I conceived that I stood pledged for its authenticity; and the matter has certainly been put in a proper light by an able and respectable critic, who has observed that "Mr. GIFFORD stands between the writer and the public," and that "his

name and character are the guarantees for the authenticity of the Letters."

This is precisely the situation in which I meant to place myself— precisely the pledge which I meant to give. The Letters are exactly what they profess to be; the production of a Lady's pen, and written in the very situations which they describe.—The public can have no grounds for suspecting my veracity on a point in which I can have no possible interest in deceiving them; and those who know me will do me the justice to acknowledge, that I have a mind superior to the arts of deception, and that I am incapable of functioning an imposition, for any purpose, or from any motives whatever. Thus much I deemed it necessary to say, as well from a regard for my own character, and from a due attention to the public, as from a wish to prevent the circulation of the work from being subjected to the impediments arising from the prevalence of a groundless suspicion.

I naturally expected, that some of the preceding remarks would excite the resentment and draw down the vengeance of those persons to whom they evidently applied. The contents of every publication are certainly a fair subject for criticism; and to the fair comments of real critics, however repugnant to the sentiments I entertain, or the doctrine I seek to inculcate, I shall ever submit without murmur or reproach. But, when men, assuming that respectable office, openly violate all the duties attached to it, and, sinking the critic in the partizan, make a wanton attack on my veracity, it becomes proper to repel the injurious imputation; and the same spirit which dictates submission to the candid award of

an impartial judge, prescribes indignation and scorn at the cowardly attacks of a secret affairin.

April 14, 1797.

## **RESIDENCE IN FRANCE**

### **DEDICATION**

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To The RIGHT HON. EDMUND BURKE.

SIR,

It is with extreme diffidence that I offer the following pages to Your notice; yet as they describe circumstances which more than justify Your own prophetic reflections, and are submitted to the public eye from no other motive than a love of truth and my country, I may, perhaps, be excused for presuming them to be not altogether unworthy of such a distinction.

While Your puny opponents, if opponents they may be called, are either sunk into oblivion, or remembered only as associated with the degrading cause they attempted to support, every true friend of mankind, anticipating the judgement of posterity, views with esteem and veneration the unvarying Moralist, the profound Politician, the indefatigable Servant of the Public, and the warm Promoter of his country's happiness.

To this universal testimony of the great and good, permit me, Sir, to join my humble tribute; being, with the utmost respect,

SIR,

Your obedient Servant, THE AUTHOR. Sept. 12, 1796.

# PREFACE

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After having, more than once, in the following Letters, expressed opinions decidedly unfavourable to female authorship, when not justified by superior talents, I may, by now producing them to the public, subject myself to the imputation either of vanity or inconstancy; and I acknowledge that a great share of candour and indulgence must be possessed by readers who attend to the apologies usually made on such occasions: yet I may with the strictest truth alledge, that I should never have ventured to offer any production of mine to the world, had I not conceived it possible that information and reflections collected and made on the spot, during a period when France exhibited a state, of which there is no example in the annals of mankind, might gratify curiosity without the aid of literary embellishment; and an adherence to truth, I flattered myself, might, on a subject of this nature, be more acceptable than brilliancy of thought, or elegance of language. The eruption of a volcano may be more scientifically described and accounted for by the philosopher; but the relation of the illiterate peasant who beheld it, and suffered from its effects, may not be less interesting to the common hearer.

Above all, I was actuated by the desire of conveying to my countrymen a just idea of that revolution which they have been incited to imitate, and of that government by which it has been proposed to model our own.

Since these pages were written, the Convention has nominally been dissolved, and a new constitution and government have succeeded, but no real change of principle

or actors has taken place; and the system, of which I have endeavoured to trace the progress, must still be considered as existing, with no other variations than such as have been necessarily produced by the difference of time and circumstances. The people grew tired of massacres en masse, and executions en detail: even the national fickleness operated in favour of humanity; and it was also discovered, that however a spirit of royalism might be subdued to temporary inaction, it was not to be eradicated, and that the sufferings of its martyrs only tended to propagate and confirm it. Hence the scaffolds flow less frequently with blood, and the barbarous prudence of CAMILLE DESMOULINS' guillotine economique has been adopted. But exaction and oppression are still practised in every shape, and justice is not less violated, nor is property more secure, than when the former was administered by revolutionary tribunals, and the latter was at the disposition of revolutionary armies.

The error of supposing that the various parties which have usurped the government of France have differed essentially from each other is pretty general; and it is common enough to hear the revolutionary tyranny exclusively associated with the person of ROBESPIERRE, and the thirty-first of May, 1793, considered as the epoch of its introduction. Yet whoever examines attentively the situation and politics of France, from the subversion of the Monarchy, will be convinced that all the principles of this monstrous government were established during the administration of the Brissotins, and that the factions which succeeded, from Danton and Robespierre to Sieyes and Barras, have only

developed them, and reduced them to practice. The revolution of the thirty-first of May, 1793, was not a contest for system but for power—that of July the twenty-eighth, 1794, (9th Thermidor,) was merely a struggle which of two parties should sacrifice the other—that of October the fifth, 1795, (13th Vendemiaire,) a war of the government against the people. But in all these convulsions, the primitive doctrines of tyranny and injustice were watched like the sacred fire, and have never for a moment been suffered to languish.

It may appear incredible to those who have not personally witnessed this phenomenon, that a government detested and despised by an immense majority of the nation, should have been able not only to resist the efforts of so many powers combined against it, but even to proceed from defence to conquest, and to mingle surprize and terror with those sentiments of contempt and abhorrence which it originally excited.

That wisdom or talents are not the sources of this success, may be deduced from the situation of France itself. The armies of the republic have, indeed, invaded the territories of its enemies, but the desolation of their own country seems to increase with every triumph—the genius of the French government appears powerful only in destruction, and inventive only in oppression—and, while it is endowed with the faculty of spreading universal ruin, it is incapable of promoting the happiness of the smallest district under its protection. The unrestrained pillage of the conquered countries has not saved France from multiplied bankruptcies, nor her state-creditors from dying through