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978-1-108-06128-5 - Reflections on the Revolution in France: And on the Proceedings in Certain Societies in London Relative to that Event

Edmund Burke

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Reflections on the Revolution in France

Regarded as a founder of modern conservatism, Edmund Burke (1729–97) proved an influential yet controversial writer and politician. Although sympathetic towards American colonists in their grievances against British rule, he was later appalled as the French Revolution unfolded. Published in 1790, when the Revolution was still young, this is Burke's most well-known work and remains a classic of Western political thought and rhetoric. He predicts the excesses that will follow the destruction of the institutions of civil society, and the inevitable rise of a corrupt and violent government rather than a protector of citizens. When she read the famous passage describing her flight from Versailles, Marie Antoinette was apparently moved to tears. Sparking a flurry of responses in defence of the Revolution and its ideals, including Thomas Paine's *Rights of Man* (also reissued in this series), Burke's polemic remains a crucial text in the history of modern political philosophy.

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*I*T may not be unnecessary to inform the Reader, that the following Reflections had their origin in a correspondence between the Author and a very young gentleman at Paris, who did him the honour of desiring his opinion upon the important transactions, which then, and ever since, have so much occupied the attention of all men. An answer was written some time in the month of October 1789; but it was kept back upon prudential considerations. That letter is alluded to in the beginning of the following sheets. It has been since forwarded to the person to whom it was addressed. The reasons for the delay in sending it were assigned in a short letter to the same gentleman. This produced on his part a new and pressing application for the Author's sentiments.

The Author began a second and more full discussion on the subject. This he had some thoughts of publishing early in the last spring; but the matter gaining upon him, he found that what he had undertaken not only far exceeded the measure of a letter, but that its importance required rather a more detailed consideration than at that time he had any leisure to bestow upon it. However, having thrown down his first thoughts in the form of a letter, and indeed when he sat down to write, having intended
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it for a private letter, he found it difficult to change the form of address, when his sentiments had grown into a greater extent, and had received another direction. A different plan, he is sensible, might be more favourable to a commodious division and distribution of his matter.



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