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Forming an Abridged History of the French Revolution

Marie Tussaud Edited by Francis Hervé

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As a younger woman, Anna Maria 'Marie' Tussaud (1761–1850) rubbed shoulders with many of the key figures of the French Revolution, sculpting in wax the likes of Louis XVI, Marie Antoinette, Marat and Robespierre. After moving to Britain, she made her living by exhibiting her sculptures in numerous towns and cities. In 1835 she settled in London and opened her museum, which became one of the city's most popular attractions. Initially reluctant about releasing her memoirs, Madame Tussaud was convinced by her editor Francis Hervé (1781–1850) that her unique position – of seeing first-hand the events and characters that drove the Revolution, while maintaining a generally non-partisan view of them – would make the book of real interest to the public. First published in 1838, it offers evocative eyewitness insights into one of the defining periods in modern European history.

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MADAME TUSSAUD IN 1778.

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MADAME TUSSAUD'S
MEMOIRS AND REMINISCENCES

OF

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FORMING AN ABRIDGED HISTORY OF THE FRENCH
REVOLUTION.

EDITED BY

FRANCIS HERVÉ, ESQ.

Author of "A Residence in Greece and Turkey," &c. &c.

~~~~~  
If princes reasoned deeply on this life,  
Its cloud-like changes, and sharp accidents,  
\* \* \* \* \*  
If we but measured glory's transient life  
With the death chamber, where all earth-born power  
Struggles for moments, as the breaking chain  
Swings o'er eternity; should we not haste  
Our course to mend, nor dare to govern ill?

*Horne's Cosmo de Medici*

~~~~~  
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P R E F A C E,

WHICH THE READER IS REQUESTED TO PERUSE.

It is hoped that the following pages may not only prove interesting, as recording the recollections of one who has witnessed some of the most appalling scenes which modern times have presented, but that they may be found useful, as forming a concise history of the most striking events connected with the Revolution.

Hitherto, the works which have appeared upon that eventful period, have generally been of so voluminous a character, as to deter those persons from reading them who cannot dispose of a large portion of their time, as also others who have not the inclination to encounter so elaborate

A

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a detail, but yet would desire to be informed of the principal occurrences of so interesting an epoch in history. To such readers, the Editor, therefore, flatters himself that the present volume will be found acceptable; and at the same time that he has endeavoured to introduce every character and circumstance connected with the Revolution, which may be deemed interesting, he has avoided dilating too fully on those scenes of horror given in many works upon the subject, with such disgusting and even indecent minuteness, as to render them totally unfit for the female eye.

The Editor feels it incumbent upon him to state, that Madame Tussaud only consented to the publication of her "Memoirs and Reminiscences" from the very pressing importunities of her friends, she alleging that it would appear both vain and presumptuous in her to imagine that she was of sufficient importance to excite any interest in the public mind. One reason alone induced her to give her sanction to the present work; so many volumes having appeared upon the

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French Revolution, the one contradicting the assertions of the other, so as to render it difficult, in many points, to arrive at a conclusion; and having, under these circumstances, often been appealed to, as to the real truth of such opposite statements, by different persons who were aware that she had been an eye-witness of those scenes upon which authors have generally written after the description of others. She, therefore, has been prevailed upon to give as accurate an account of what occurred during her residence in France, comprising a period of more than thirty years, as her memory will permit, and which may be considered as totally unbiassed by any political prejudice. As, however, it might be supposed that her attachment to the French royal family, in consequence of having lived with them, and experienced their protection and kindness, would render her testimony of a partial nature; yet, on the other hand, her uncle's intimacy with Voltaire, Rosseau, Franklin, Necker, Mirabeau, &c. produced that counteraction in her mind, which served to neutralize her feelings on the subject,

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and prevent any predilection from predominating for either party.

Should her Reminiscences in France be favourably received, she will then be emboldened to present to the public those arising from her thirty-six years residence in England, which will contain anecdotes of as many conspicuous and eminent British characters, with whom she has been brought in contact, as the present work exhibits concerning those of the French.

It may be remarked, that throughout the following Memoirs sufficient attention has not been devoted towards designating the precise period when many of the anecdotes occurred; but an extreme difficulty has been found in ascertaining at what exact time certain circumstances took place, as, although the memory of Madame Tussaud is remarkably clear for events, it is not the same for dates, whilst, being nearly eighty years of age, and having passed so considerable a period of her life under a constant state of

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excitement, the recollections must sometimes be in a degree confused and impaired; but that the Editor should not lead his readers into error, by any anachronism, he acknowledges himself indebted to the second volume of a work entitled, "How to enjoy Paris," (by his brother, Peter Hervé,) which has been deduced from the best authorities, and is, in a chronological point of view, particularly correct. The Editor flatters himself, therefore, that no flagrant discrepancy will be found.

With regard to the personal descriptions of the different characters introduced throughout the work, it may be confidently asserted, that they are likely to be far more accurate than those generally given by other authors, Madame Tussaud, from her profession, naturally becoming a more accurate observer of physical appearance than others usually are; and most of the translators from the French have fallen into the error of calculating the inch of France the same as our own, whereas the French foot is twelve

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inches seven-eighths English. Thus, in a recent work, describing Robespierre, he is stated to be but five feet three inches, but this being French measure, he would be, according to our own, five feet eight. But as it appertains to human nature to see the faults of others with a keener eye than those we ourselves commit, it is but fair to conclude that the work now presented to the public must have its allotted portion, for which the Editor claims the indulgence of the Reader.

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