

what unnecessarily, been a suspicious figure in intellectual life. But Southey defended the political transformation by rather cleverly noting of his critics: "They had turned their faces towards the east in the morning to worship the rising sun, and in the evening were looking eastwards still, obstinately affirming that still the sun was there. I, on the contrary, altered my position as the world went round."

In his last, declining years Wordsworth became the archetype of the Grand Old Man of English letters. He was famous, he was genial, and he had contributed inestimably to the "dialect of the tribe." Coleridge rated him only after Shakespeare and Milton; and even the sarcastic Byron admitted his lasting importance. In his worst moments with the critics, Wordsworth insisted that history would vindicate him, and he was right. History apparently means never having to say you're sorry—unless, of course, you are.

Davies' book is informative, humorous, and fills a noticeable gap in literary biography. It fully captures the life of a great man who sought to reconcile the paradoxes of his time.

Reviewed by KENNETH ZARETZKE

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## *Of the Fate of Men and Nations*

**The Days of the French Revolution**, by Christopher Hibbert, *New York: William Morrow and Co., 1980. 352 pp. \$12.95.*

WOULD THAT the world could conquer evil ever readily with but a mere human light, then more real virtue could come instead of vice. Is this the Great French Revolution, one asks, upon whose shoulders martyrs fell, when the polluted, crimson truth of revolution would not, could not, tell night from dawn of a new world or age? The major divide in French Revolution historiography,

according to historian Augustin Cochin, is between the thesis of circumstances and the thesis of the plot. The former view is taken in Christopher Hibbert's *The Days of the French Revolution*.

Mr. Hibbert covers most of the same ground, as other writers of good summaries of the subject, though in a more suggestive, colorful, and descriptive manner. He seeks, however, to provide only a basic introduction to the subject. The author gives a fairly moderate assessment and only slightly judgmental review of this insanely extended *journée* of modern French history. The two operative words of the book are *sans-culottes*, the prevalent mob, and *journée*, a momentous day of significant action.

One encounters a twice-told story by stereotype, in a rather conventional mode, whereby all characters willingly conform to type: a pseudo-novelette. Many of the usual criticisms of Marie Antoinette and Louis XVI are, for example, simply repeated without debate as to differing interpretations. Yet, some of the high drama of those critical days is emotionally<sup>a</sup> portrayed with style. Though Hibbert cites Christopher Dawson's *Gods of Revolution* in his bibliography, there is no visible sign that Dawson's work has made a dent upon the author's own consciousness of the Revolution.

The book's three appendices (information about some characters whose fate is unrecorded in the main text, a glossary of French terms, and a table of principal events) are very useful. There are, in addition, two maps, one of prerevolutionary France from 1715 to 1789 and one of Paris in 1790. The index does not include all names. There is also a collection of the usual kinds of illustrations depicting personalities and propaganda, and personalities *qua* propaganda. Although Hibbert was the winner of the 1962 Heinemann Award for Literature, the reader will be troubled to find some poorly structured sentences and paragraphs.

The book dances across a stage filled with mismatched representatives of a country gone mad. With disobedient actors, it was not surprising that the Revolution both gained and lost so many directors. The text illustrates how the leaders of enlightened politics

spoke and acted in a manner suited to theatrical entertainment, *not* political reality. Hibbert shows how such actors generated an overestimate of what government could do connected to an underestimate of human imperfection; it was, quite literally, a deadly plot combination.

The author speaks of "conservative revolutionaries," and, moreover, notes that the fall of Robespierre provoked "the Revolution's lurching to the Right." There occurred "the rightward flow of the revolutionary tide." Hibbert seems to suggest, however, that the advent of Bonaparte on 19 Brumaire was, in revolutionary terms, actually anticlimactic. Hibbert also finds "fanatical extremists of the Right" who conducted a "White Terror," but such terms are never used by him about the Left. Surely, it was a strange Right that hit "out alternately at reactionaries and radicals alike." Usage of such debatable terms in those contexts is, at best, ambiguous and, at worst, meaningless to the point of absurdity. As a side note, Dr. Joseph Ignace Guillotin (1738-1814), that blessed humanitarian, died peacefully of old age. Is there a moral in that?

In fact, a radical contempt for everything human, everything concrete, was raised in abstract favor of man, reason, and nature: *Liberty, Fraternity, Equality*. Against such an evil reality, Tom Paine's *The Rights of Man* can be jocularly interpreted as written by a blind escapee from an insane asylum. Was there blood enough to satisfy an anemic vampire? Such awful, frightful things are truly inexplicable, one comes to suspect, in anything less than plainly demonic terms of reference. Yet, no mere fortress fell in a summer's day; it was the *truth* that collapsed first, even before the men who died. Various historical allusions to tenuous propositions of revolutionary necessity are porous justifications for satanic results, for deed matched to vice. Through great offense, the tolerant mind becomes shattered, the enraged soul is burdened by ideological lust. The proper range of false glory is not far from the justice that follows hard upon a dead dream, when men uselessly have cried out for cold pity, and no more. With such knowledge, those who are proud to call themselves *persons* of

the Left are clearly without shame or conscience. Was Robespierre a saint having revolutionary grace under pressure?

Oh, to be a young Wordsworth was to be old then, and so sheared of vile grace by passion scorned to high Heaven's glory: the secularist attack upon established religion! Of what remorse was there in the end of that end of all human decency guillotined, by the forever spiteful vice of power engorged on itself, with wild delight upon all human flesh? Hibbert details how horror followed horror to no good end; horrible cuts by the guillotine's incestuous blade were made against friend and foe, for modern gods of iron do greatly riot when they rage. And, the chief political victims of the Revolution's towering fury?

After the King's capture on the flight to Varennes, faced with the constant and real threat of death, he courageously continued to veto many of the revolutionary regime's decrees. Hibbert nowhere weighs this obvious contradiction against many mentioned charges of weak-minded vacillation by Louis XVI. Marie Antoinette, accused of incest with her son and other such activities, was polite even with her executioners on the way to the scaffold. The fact that no historical proof whatsoever exists to uphold immoral accusations, repeated in the text, does not seem to bother writers like Hibbert.

Although the author includes much nauseating detail, often in vivid language, he does not tell all. For example, the orphaned Dauphin, before dying at ten years of age, was turned over to an accomplished whore who was explicitly given the task of trying to corrupt the boy's morals, but she failed miserably. Macabre spectacles in regard to the terrible desecration of royalist and convent cemeteries occurred during the unnatural performance of necrophilic acts. In addition, Hibbert gives very conservative estimates of deaths due to the Revolution.

What of the Napoleonic wars, as part of the broader Revolution, that consumed at least 5,000,000 lives? It is not mentioned, on a much smaller point, that the text illustration of Jacques-Louis David's famous propaganda painting gives a false impression; no priest was ever actually present at the center

of the tennis court oath's celebration. Works such as Lord Kenneth Clark's *Romantic Rebellion* mention that fact about David's painting. In addition, the reader would be wise to consult J. D. Talmon's *Origins of Totalitarian Democracy*.

One may easily disagree with Hibbert's bland conclusion by observing that Europe's humanity was the true victim of the Revolution, *not* Napoleon, except in a cheaply poetic sense. On the other hand, the author's purpose of providing an introductory text has been served, but proper perspective may have been lost. *Le mieux est l'ennemi du bien!* Of the fate of men and nations, Hibbert remains blind.

Reviewed by JOSEPH ANDREW SETTANNI