

A Book of the Week.

THE BARRAS MEMOIRS.*

I HAD been looking forward for some months to reading this "Memoirs of Barras," who knew Napoleon Bonaparte so intimately well from his earliest struggling days during the siege of Toulon till he was Emperor of the French nation, and who, moreover, lived through the great French Revolution, and was able to observe with cynical eye the part borne in that great moral earthquake by Robespierre, Danton and Marat. Everyone interested in French history looked forward with eager anticipation to the publication of these famous and long-promised memoirs; and now they lie on the table before me, and the most powerful impression left upon me after reading the first two volumes is that Barras himself, the writer of these autobiographical memoirs, must have been the most cold-blooded scoundrel himself that ever walked God's earth. It is impossible to read even a few pages of these volumes without detesting their author. The memoirs have been written by Barras with the intention of blackening the character of Napoleon irretrievably and finally; but soot is apt to soil the hands of whoever throws it, and the old proverb says truly that "curses come home to roost," so that many of the venomous accusations made by Barras recoil upon himself. He was incapable of appreciating anything or anybody, and the manner in which he writes of the women with whom he had relations of friendship—or more intimate still—is worthy of the execration of all fair-minded men and women. A very famous judge once remarked that if a co-respondent told tales against the woman who was his partner in guilt, "the man must be such a blackguard that he would not believe a word that he said." This verdict must be applied to Barras when he tells the story of Josephine's pleading to obtain his interest for Bonaparte.

It is difficult to have a very high opinion of either Napoleon's or Josephine's morality, or indeed of that of any member of the Bonaparte family, but the man who can write as Barras does, deserves to be disbelieved—and most readers of his cold-blooded, stony-hearted accusations must and will disbelieve in his version of his intrigues with Madame de Beauharnais. I think everything that Barras writes about the women of his time should be read with suspicion.

His account of the French Revolution is strangely uninteresting, he lived through and in the most exciting and thrilling part of the world's history, but he writes about it coldly, and with a sort of chilly disapproval that prevents his eye-witness accounts from being as interesting as they ought to be. In the first volume, however, Barras does give a most historic account of an interview that he had with Robespierre in a little house in the Rue St. Honoré. Robespierre received him wrapped in a sort of *chemise-peignoir*, with powdered hair which had just been dressed, and without his spectacles which he usually wore in public. Robespierre shewed Barras no courtesy, ignored his salutations, washed himself in a hand-basin and cleaned his teeth, without heeding the presence of his visitor.

* "Memoires de Barras, Membre du Directoire publiés," par George Duruy. (Hachette et Cie., 1895.)
"Memoirs of Barras," &c., &c., translated by Charles E. Roche. (Osgood, McIlvaine, 1895.)

Barras states that he informed him that his visit was prompted "by the esteem in which we held his political principles" (but he continues), Robespierre

"Did not deign replying to me by a single word, nor did his face reveal the trace of any emotion whatsoever. . . . Such was our interview with Robespierre. I cannot call it a conversation, for his lips never parted; tightly closed as they were, he pursed them even tighter; from then I noticed oozed a bilious froth boding no good. I had seen all I wanted, for I had a view of what has since been accurately described as the tiger-cat."

This appalling silence of Robespierre's is indeed graphically described, and gives an awful picture of the "mighty master of death." Marat and Danton are also much written about in this volume, but there is nothing in it so interesting, at least to my mind, as this interview between these two cold-blooded, bad men—Barras and Robespierre—for that Barras was a bad man himself few people will question after reading his memoirs.

Space fails me to dwell on Barras' little-hearted, small-natured estimate of the great Napoleon. I do not admire Bonaparte as a man or as a husband, but he was a great figure head in the history of Europe, and he was undoubtedly, if not the best, yet assuredly the greatest man of his century. Barras has thrown mud enough in all conscience to submerge the reputation of a Titan; but somehow through it all Napoleon's own prophecy comes true, a prophecy which the editor of these memoirs, Mons. George Duruy, very aptly quotes on the title page—"I am fated to be food for pamphleteers. I am not afraid to be their victim, for they will bite upon granite."

A. M. G.

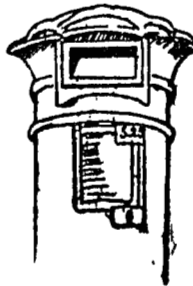
Coming Events.

July 29th.—Meeting of Members of the Medical Profession who are opposed to the Registration of Midwives, at St. Martin's Town Hall, Charing Cross Road, at 9 p.m.

July 31st.—Sir Joseph Lister will be presented with a testimonial by Sir John Erichsen, at King's College Hospital, Lincoln's Inn Fields.

Letters to the Editor.

(Notes, Queries, &c.)



Whilst cordially inviting communications upon all subjects for these columns, we wish it to be distinctly understood that we do not IN ANY WAY hold ourselves responsible for the opinions expressed by our correspondents.

ASSOCIATION OF ASYLUM WORKERS.

To the Editor of "The Nursing Record."

MADAM,—You have always taken such a very leading part, and shown so much sympathy in any movement which tends to bring the individual members of any profession or calling into unity, that I am sure you will rejoice in the formation of the Association of Asylum Workers. Agitation has been going on for some time in our ranks with regard to the formation of some association through which we could

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