

THE REVERSE OF THE MEDAL.

MICHELET ON THE GLORY OF THE FIRST EMPIRE.

COMMUNICATED BY GABRIEL MONOD.

WHENEVER French writers or historians speak of the First Empire we are inclined to attach to it the notion of an age of glory. It was commonly regarded as the most brilliant period in French history when France was leading the world and was feared as well as respected by all the other powers of Europe; but when we hear a contemporary who still remembers the days of Napoleon the Great, the picture appears in a different light. This thought is impressed on us when reading a passage of the manuscript of Jules Michelet, the celebrated French historian of the last century, communicated to us by Monsieur Monod, member of the Institute and president of one of the great special schools of the Paris University. Monsieur Monod is Jules Michelet's literary executor. He belongs to one of the most distinguished Protestant families of France, and after the decease of his senior friend was regarded as the most learned historical scholar in contemporary France.

Monsieur Monod writes as follows:

"In his last piece of historical writing—"The History of the Nineteenth Century"—Michelet pronounced a most severe judgment on Napoleon I and his policy of conquests. But it would be a mistake to conclude that this severity was due to the misfortunes of 1870 and Michelet's hostility towards the Second Empire. He always preached peace among the nations and in 1870 protested eloquently against a conflict which he considered fratricidal and whose sad consequences he foresaw. He retained unhappy recollections of the wars of Napoleon I and below is given what he said of them on August 23, 1845, in a fragment entitled *My Childhood and the End of the Empire.*"

The passage of Jules Michelet communicated by Monsieur Monod reads as follows:

"Dies irae, Dies illa.

"Nothing has been more instrumental in aiding me to understand the somber monotony of the Middle Ages, that waiting without hope, without desire, unless it were for death, in a word, that abandonment of one's self, than my own languishment, as a child, during the closing years of the First Empire. To-day, that period where the years were marked by victories, seems all luster. But then, all was somber. Somber was France. Light shone only on the army; and outside of France, on this or that barbaric name. The principles of the Revolution, which had been the soul of these grand wars, were quite forgotten. Most people did not know why they were fighting. The mind was exhausted, the finances exhausted, our blood exhausted. Every year three hundred thousand men were sent out who never came back. There was no more drawing of lots; everybody was taken. Abroad, a bloody death; at home, an intellectual death. Nowhere any principle to which one was willing to sacrifice one's self. There was no hope. A certain category profited by the situation: those who followed the army like vultures, and a small number of bold big manufacturers, who, thanks to the protective system, were able to fleece us.

"This epoch, which differed from the declining days of the Roman Empire and the Middle Ages, by its military prowess, resembled them very strongly by the contrast between the tragedies abroad and the futilities at home. We may get some idea of this from a little fact almost too mean to relate. During the terrible disasters of 1813-14, our family lived from two sources,—the sale of puzzles and society games! Read the newspapers of the Revolution. They all scintillate with ideas. Midst their rhetoric and declamation, you feel yourself in light. Then turn to the *Moniteur* and the *Journal des Débats* during the Empire. What dryness, what poverty! The review of a book by M. de Jouy, a feuilleton of M. Geoffroy against Mme. de Genlis, an ode by M. Baour,—that is the whole life of the time. Nobody, it must be said, then took life seriously. Everything which meant a future, an existence of some length, was neglected. What was the use of it? A man lived twenty years; no more. There was a fixed limit. Life, why? Death, why? Who could answer the question? A miserable existence, an early death,—one was much like the other."