

**A SKETCH OF THE
MILITARY AND
POLITICAL POWER OF
RUSSIA, IN THE YEAR 1817**

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ROBERT THOMAS WILSON

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1851

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P R E F A C E.

THE tranquillity of Europe was the professed object and promise of the belligerent system pursued for twenty-five years by the British Cabinet: a tranquillity, not such as Tiberius or Sylla conferred on Rome, when the oppressed and the wretched were denied the utterance of their griefs, but one which should be the fruit of a policy conciliating the public feeling, and associating to its support the wise and the good of all countries—a tranquillity, which should possess the principles of self preservation, by connecting the powerful and the weak, the conquering and the conquered, in bonds of common interest.

It would be a mockery of the public understanding to enter into an elaborate dis-

cussion for the purpose of proving, that this pledge has, in no one instance, been redeemed.

Where is that peace accompanied with the blessings of peace?

What injuries have been redressed by a disinterested act of justice?

What passions have been appeased by the generosity of power?

The eye of the most resolute is daunted at the flashes of popular indignation—The throes of suffering humanity are accompanied with an expression of despair so fearful as to make foolish men to think, and thinking men to tremble.

“We have suffered affliction without gaining wisdom,” and, severe as the late struggles have been, there is too much cause to apprehend “our warfare is not accomplished”—that there may be other struggles, which, if once begun, can admit of no compromise, since former dis-

appointment will animate the contending parties with an unrelenting ferocity, susceptible of no mitigation.

The author, however, does not propose to notice more of the *moral* state of Europe than is necessary to establish his position, that *Russia, profiting by the events, which have afflicted Europe, has not only raised her ascendancy on natural sources, sufficient to maintain a preponderating power, but farther, that she has been presented by her rivals with the sceptre of universal dominion.* Bold as this position may be thought, the prediction of such an event was made when the horoscope of Russia, to common observers, did not appear so fair. The prediction, nevertheless, has been so closely verified, that the extract will engage interest.

“ When the Czar and the Consul draw forth their legions in hostile array, mediation, armed coalitions, neutral conventions,

and *demarkation lines*, will be of little avail. These powers have long been unused to cabinet warfare, and to courtier *etiquette* in the field.

“The intervention of other states may *hasten* their own subjection, but cannot ward off their fate. The chieftains of Russia and France will meet nearly on the centre of the world: the object of their quarrel will not be a bishopric, a sugar island, nor who shall read their mass in Latin, or say their prayers in Greek — they will fight for the possession of the Hellespont and Bosphorus, two posts on which hangs *now* suspended the *empire of our Eastern Hemisphere*. Such contending parties will not come out to skirmish and then mutually retire, nor will they fight for conquests to give away; the one will keep the field, and with it the *Dictatorship of the World**!”

* “Sketches on the intrinsic Strength, Military and Naval Force, of France and Russia.” 1803.

Some political Hectors have thrown down the gauntlet, as if they were prepared to oppose attitude to attitude, and force to force — As if a power *really* existed to repress or punish any and every attempt to remove a neighbour's landmark.

The hour of illusion is, however, passed, and mankind are no longer the dupes of big or fair words. That belief, that faith, which was indulged after reason had ceased, is finally exhausted; and, though Don Sebastian, or Joanna Southcote may still live in the credulity of their followers, although Mahomet might yet attract multitudes to see him put the mountain in march, or bottle conjurors again levy a fine on London's curiosity, Englishmen will no longer be persuaded by ministers to shut their eyes, as witless children, and catch at fruit, which, when caught, is

Like the apple on the Dead Sea's shore,
All ashes to the taste.