

**VOLNEY'S RUINS, OR, MEDITATION ON THE
REVOLUTIONS OF EMPIRES. TRANSLATED
UNDER THE IMMEDIATE INSPECTION OF THE
AUTHOR FROM THE LAST PARIS EDITION. TO
WHICH IS ADDED, THE LAW OF NATURE, AND
A SHORT BIOGRAPHICAL NOTICE, PP. 1-217**

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Volney's Ruins, or, Meditation on the Revolutions of Empires. Translated Under the Immediate Inspection of the Author from the Last Paris Edition. To Which Is Added, the Law of Nature, and a Short Biographical Notice, pp. 1-217 by Count Daru

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COUNT DARU

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OR,

MEDITATION ON THE REVOLUTIONS OF EMPIRES.

TRANSLATED,

UNDER THE IMMEDIATE INSPECTION OF THE AUTHOR,
FROM THE LATEST PARIS EDITION.

WITH HIS

NOTES OF ILLUSTRATION.

TO WHICH IS ADDED,

THE LAW OF NATURE,

AND

A SHORT BIOGRAPHICAL NOTICE

BY COUNT DARU.

**I will go into the desert and dwell among ruins: I will interrogate ancient monuments on the wisdom of past times."—CHAP. iv., p. 31.*

BOSTON.

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1869.

ADVERTISEMENT

VOLNEY'S RUINS:

OR, MEDITATION ON THE REVOLUTIONS OF EMPIRES

THE superior merits of this work are too well known to require commendation; but as it is not generally known that there are in circulation three English translations of it, varying very materially in regard to faithfulness and elegance of diction, the publisher of the present edition insert the following extracts for the information of purchasers and readers:—

PARIS TRANSLATION,

From which this Edition is printed.

INVOCATION.

HAIL, solitary ruins! holy sepulchres, and silent walls! you I invoke; to you I address my prayer. While your aspect averts, with secret terror, the vulgar regard, it excites in my heart the charm of delicious sentiments—sublime contemplations. What useful lessons! what affecting and profound reflections you suggest to him who knows how to consult you. When the whole earth in chains and silence, bowed the neck before its tyrants, you had already proclaimed the truths which they abhor, and confounding the dust of the king with that of the meanest slave, had announced to man the sacred dogmas of EQUALITY! Within your pale, in solitary adoration of LIBERTY, I saw her Genius arise from the mansions of the dead; not such as she is painted by the impassioned multitude, armed with fire and sword, but under the august aspect of Justice, posing in her hand the sacred balance, wherein are weighed the actions of men at the gates of eternity.

O Tombs! what virtues are yours! you appal the tyrant's heart, and poison with secret alarm his impious joys; he flies, with coward step, your incorruptible aspect, and erects afar his throne of insolence.

LONDON TRANSLATION

INVOCATION.

Solitary ruins, sacred tombs, ye mouldering and silent walls, all hail! To you I address my invocation. While the vulgar shrink from your aspect with secret terror, my heart finds in the contemplation a thousand delicious sentiments, a thousand admirable recollections. Pregnant, I may truly call you, with useful lessons, with pathetic and irresistible advice to the man who knows how to consult you. A while ago the whole world bowed the neck in silence before the tyrants that oppressed it; and yet in that hopeless moment you already proclaimed the truths that tyrants hold in abhorrence: mixing the dust of the proudest kings with that of the meanest slaves, you called upon us to contemplate this example of EQUALITY. From your caverns, whither the musing and anxious love of LIBERTY led me, I saw escape its venerable shade, and with unexpected felicity, direct its flight and marshal my steps the way to renovated France.

Tombs! what virtues and potency do you exhibit! Tyrants tremble at your aspect—you poison with secret alarm their impious pleasures—they turn from you with impatience, and, cowardlike, endeavor to forget you amid the sumptuousness of their palaces.

PHILADELPHIA TRANSLATION.

INVOCATION.

Hail, ye solitary ruins, ye sacred tombs, and silent walls! 'Tis your auspicious aid that I invoke; 'tis to you my soul, wrapt in meditation, pours forth its prayer! What though the profane and vulgar mind sinks with dismay from your august and awe-inspiring aspect; to me ye unfold the sublimest charms of contemplation and sentiment, and offer to my senses the luxury of a thousand delicious and enchanting thoughts! How sumptuous the feast in a being that has a taste to relish, and an understanding to consult you! What rich and noble admonitions; what exquisite and pathetic lessons do you read to a heart that is susceptible of exalted feelings! When oppressed humanity bent in linnid silence throughout the globe beneath the galling yoke of slavery, it was you that proclaimed aloud the brightness of those truths which tyrants tremble at while they detect, and which, by sinking the loftiest head of the proudest potentate, with all his boasted pageantry, to the level of mortality with his meanest slave, confirmed and raised by your unerring testimony the sacred and immortal doctrine of Equality.

Musing within the precincts of your inviting solitude, whither the insatiate love of true-born Luxury had led me, I beheld her Genius ascending, not in the spurious character and habit of a blood-thirsty Fury armed with daggers and instruments of murder, and followed by a frantic and intoxicated multitude, but under the placid and chaste aspect of Justice, holding with a pure and unswerving hand the sacred scales in which the actions of mortals are weighed on the brink of eternity.

O ye tombs and emblematic images of death! How superlative is your power! how irresistible your influence! Your presence appals and chills the souls of tyrants with electric horror and remorse; the very remembrance of you haunts their minds like a ghastly specter in the midst of their voluptuous enjoyments, and the terror you inspire plants thorns in all their thoughts, and poisons their impious pleasures into pains.

The first translation was made and published in London soon after the appearance of the work in French, and, by a late edition, is still adopted without alteration. Mr. Volney, when in this country, in 1797, expressed his disapprobation of this translation, alleging that the translator must have been overawed by the government or clergy from rendering his ideas faithfully; and accordingly an English gentleman, then in Philadelphia, volunteered to correct this edition. But by his endeavors to give the true and full meaning of the author with great precision, he has so overloaded his composition with an exuberance of words, as in a great measure to dissipate the simple elegance and sublimity of the original. Mr. Volney, when he became better acquainted with the English language, perceived this defect; and, with the aid of our countryman, Joel Barlow, made and published in Paris a new, correct, and elegant translation, of which the present edition is a faithful and correct copy.

P R E F A C E

OF THE EDITOR.

If books were to be judged of by their volume, the following would have but little value ; if appraised by their contents, it will perhaps be reckoned among the most instructive.

In general, nothing is more important than a good elementary book ; but, also, nothing is more difficult to compose, and even to read : and why ? Because, as everything in it should be analysis and definition, all should be expressed with truth and precision. If truth and precision are wanting, the object has not been attained ; if they exist, its very force renders it abstract.

The first of these defects has been hitherto evident in all books of morality ; we find in them only a chaos of incoherent maxims, precepts without causes, and actions without a motive. The pedants of the human race have treated it like a little child ; they have prescribed to it good behavior by frightening it with spirits and hobgoblins. Now that the growth of the human race is rapid, it is time to speak reason to it ; it is time to prove to men that the springs of their improvement are to be found in their very organization, in the interest of their passions, and in a