

**THE FRENCH REVOLUTION TESTED BY  
MIRABEAU'S CAREER; TWELVE  
LECTURES ON THE HISTORY  
OF THE FRENCH REVOLUTION,  
DELIVERED AT THE LOWELL INSTITUTE,  
BOSTON, MASS. VOL. II**

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**H. VON HOLST**

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# "THE FRENCH REVOLUTION"

*TESTED BY MIRABEAU'S CAREER*

TWELVE LECTURES ON THE HISTORY OF THE FRENCH  
REVOLUTION, DELIVERED AT THE LOWELL  
INSTITUTE, BOSTON, MASS.

BY  
H. VON HOLST

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VOL. II.

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**Dedicated**  
TO  
MY WIFE,  
**ANNIE ISABELLE, née HATT,**  
IN TOKEN OF GRATITUDE  
FOR THE SYMPATHY AND AID  
GIVEN ME FOR TWENTY-TWO YEARS  
IN MY LITERARY LABORS.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS.

Vol. II.

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LECTURE	PAGE
VII. "The Party of One Man" .....	1
VIII. The 5th and 6th of October, 1789, and the Memoir of the 15th.....	41
IX. The Decisive Defeat of the 7th of November....	83
X. Other Defeats and Mischievous Victories.....	128
XI. Mirabeau and the Court.....	167
XII. The End. A Unique Tragedy .....	207



# THE FRENCH REVOLUTION.

TESTED BY

THE CAREER OF MIRABEAU.

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LECTURE VII.

*The Party of One Man.*

AT the solemn opening of the States-General, as we heard Mirabeau say, "they were drunk with the desire to applaud, and they applauded unto satiety." As to one man, however, the assembly made an exception. Gouverneur Morris, who was present, reports, that when Mirabeau entered, he was "hissed." The days came when he was more thunderingly applauded than any one else, but at the same time hissing never ceased, and it is still continued, I am tempted to say, not only in France, but by France. Not to applaud him is

impossible, for it would only prove that one is too dull to understand that he was a genius. But it is with a kind of reluctance and a somewhat apologetic air that France glories in him, while the hissing is not done with regret. There is an undertone of elation in the moral satisfaction derived from it. It seems to say: "There is, of course, no denying that he was the greatest orator of the revolution, but don't insult me by supposing that this betrays me into not taking him at his true worth."

This applies also to his best biographer. Mr. Loménie once calls him "the inexplicable man,"<sup>1</sup> Some historians might have hesitated to write and publish several stout volumes on a man, so long as they had to confess to themselves that they failed to understand him. Happily Mr. Loménie did not think so—happily, for he has brought many new facts to light and enabled us to see in many respects more clearly and more correctly. Mirabeau's biography, however, must needs still be written, for it evidently can only be written by a man who does understand him.

That Mr. Loménie did not succeed in this is, in my opinion, due to the following causes:—

<sup>1</sup> Œuvres., II, 436.

The historian has to be an uncompromising searcher for truth. In searching for truth he has, however, not to be animated by the spirit of the state attorney working up a case, but by that broad sympathy capable of seeing that, if men and times are but really *understood*, the moral *guilt* of their follies and crimes almost always appears diminished by one-half. Men, however, never can be really understood, if they are not judged as children of their times. I am far from charging Mr. Loménie with having overlooked this; but, I think, he has not allowed it all the weight that must be accorded to it. Much of what ought to be charged against the times—principally or, at least, to a considerable extent—is made to appear, altogether or chiefly, an item of Mirabeau's personal account. He is a genuine son of his times. Not only their characteristic brilliant traits, but their follies and vices also have in him a pre-eminent representative.

Mr. Loménie, besides, has not found his way out of the maze of contradictions presented by Mirabeau's character. He has not kept sufficiently in mind that almost all men are a compound of inconsistencies and self-contradictions. Truly harmonious and thoroughly consistent characters are so rare, that they might be called white ravens,