

**A HISTORY OF FRANCE FROM
THE DEATH OF LOUIS XI. VOL. I:
REIGN OF CHARLES VIII,
REGENCY OF ANNE OF BEAUJEU
1483-1493**

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A History of France from the Death of Louis XI. Vol. I: Reign of Charles VIII, Regency of Anne of Beaujeu 1483-1493 by John S. C. Bridge

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VOLUME I

REIGN OF CHARLES VIII

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PREFACE

THE period of French history with which this volume deals has been neglected by historians. Little or nothing has been written about it in English beyond the necessarily brief accounts to be found in such general histories as those of Sir Nathaniel Wraxall (1795), Dean G. W. Kitchin (1873-1877), Mr. A. J. Grant (1900), and Mr. J. R. Moreton Macdonald (1915). Even in France a good many years have passed since the period was last studied in detail, the most recent books devoted to it being Dupuy's *Histoire de la Réunion de la Bretagne à la France*, published in 1880, and Pélicier's *Essai sur le Gouvernement de la Dame de Beaujeu*, published in 1882. The neglect may be attributed to two causes. It is due primarily to the comparative paucity of original materials, and especially to the silence of the one attractive contemporary writer, Philippe de Commines, who quarrelled with Anne de Beaujeu, and revenged himself by omitting all reference to her career. It is also encouraged by the fact that the years immediately following the death of Louis XI seem to suffer by contrast both with those that came before them and with those that came after—on the one hand, with the dramatic interest of one of the most striking reigns in French history, and, on the other, with the romantic story of that first Italian expedition which is usually regarded as the beginning of modern European history.

Yet it would be a mistake to suppose that the period of Anne de Beaujeu's regency is lacking either in interest or in importance, and it may be questioned whether any decade in French history exercised a more decisive

influence in the creation of monarchical France. For this period witnessed the efforts and the failure of the States-General of Tours in 1484, an assembly which enjoyed an opportunity as favourable as was ever presented under the *ancien régime* for establishing constitutional government ; in the coalition of jealous neighbours eager to arrest French progress it saw the first application of the theory of the balance of power ; it beheld the acquisition by France of the great province of Brittany, essential to her unity, and vital to her safety ; and, lastly, it saw the final extinction of the spirit of provincial feudalism which for so long had menaced the growth of the nation and curtailed the power of the Crown. This is a striking record for ten short years ; and, were the tale of her achievement more familiar, the reputation of Anne de Beaujeu, by whom France was then governed, would stand much higher than it does. It has been truly said of Anne that she was ' the first and perhaps the best of that series of remarkable women who hold high place in the annals of the rulers of France '. It would scarcely be too much to say that by character, capacity, and the test of her limited opportunity, she is fitted to take her place by the side of the greatest women who in any country or in any age have moulded the destinies of nations.

It would seem that the time has come when the period of Anne's regency may profitably be studied again in the light of the materials which have accumulated since last it was examined in detail. Unfortunately, however, it is but too clear that the English writer who sets out to produce a history of France is guilty of an act of presumption which cannot readily be justified. The historians to whom France herself gives birth are amongst the most brilliant in the world, and their works are distinguished by a skill in construction, a clarity and elegance of style, a breadth of philosophic outlook, and a happy combination of polish with profundity, which must be the despair of the alien

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labourer in the same field. It may be, however, that despite obvious points of inferiority the work of an English student will be recommended to his fellow-countrymen by the possession of some qualities necessarily denied to a more brilliant foreign scholarship; and it is in such a hope that I have undertaken this History. 'If I have done well, and as is fitting the story, it is that which I desired; but if slenderly and meanly, it is that which I could attain unto.'

JOHN S. C. BRIDGE.

TURVILLE PARK,
HENLEY-ON-THAMES, *July*, 1921.

ERRATUM

Page 133, footnote 1. *for end of volume read frontispiece.*