

LOUIS ADOLPHE THIERS

LOUIS ADOLPHE THIERS, a distinguished French statesman and historian, was born at Marseilles, April 15, 1797, and died at St. Germain-en-Laye, near Paris, Sept. 3, 1877. He was carefully educated, and, after obtaining the degree of B. A., he was admitted to the Bar and sought to practice his profession at Paris. Finding it impossible to gain a living by the law, he began to write for the "Constitutionnel," and afterward for his own journal, "The National," meanwhile prosecuting his historical researches, the outcome of which was his "History of the Revolution." His more voluminous and to English readers better-known work, the "History of the Consulate and Empire," was not published until 1845, after he had been for a time Prime Minister. In his capacity of journalist he aided, in 1829, to bring on the revolution which made Louis Philippe King of the French. Under the July monarchy, Thiers filled various posts in successive Cabinets until in 1840, when he became president of the Council. Louis Napoleon's *coup d'état* of Dec. 2, 1851, led to his banishment, but having been suffered to return to France, he was elected to the Corps Législatif, and during the latter years of the Second Empire was in that body by far the most effective and prominent member of the Opposition. By the National Assembly, which in 1871 was convoked at Bordeaux, but which subsequently was transferred to Versailles, he was made President of the Republic, and held the office for a little more than a year, being succeeded, in May, 1873, by Marshal Macmahon.

SPEECH AT ARCACHON

DELIVERED OCTOBER 17, 1875

GENTLEMEN,—I thank you most sincerely for your attitude toward me upon this occasion. It was in your midst that I passed those four frightful months of our misfortunes. You saw me each day dismayed, distressed, as were you all, at the news of our disasters which succeeded each other without interruption, and I asked myself in despair when the end would come. Suddenly, in this situation of affairs, which seemed without remedy, I found

(238)

myself borne down by the weight of an authority which certainly was not enviable, but which I could not refuse; and you have seen with your own eyes my efforts to make head against the reverses of France. You then are my witnesses before her, my witnesses before history, and I thank you for coming this day to bring me your sincere and loyal testimony.

You have seen everything, gentlemen: no army, and if I had possessed one, no resources with which to pay it; 200,000 of the enemies before Paris, as many in Champagne and in Burgundy, 150,000 at Tours menacing Bordeaux, 150,000 at Bourges threatening Lyons; all parties aroused and ready to come to blows; the cities of the south united for the republic; Paris given over to the Commune, and for the information of a government that should surmount these difficulties; the universal defiance of those spirits ready to refuse their aid to any government that should not conform to their prejudices.

In this situation, the memory of which when I recall it moves me profoundly, did I hesitate? No! I did not ask myself if I should succeed. I thought only of my duty which was not to succeed but to dedicate myself. I thought no more of the monarchy than of the republic. I accepted the trust under the form in which it was given, and such as events had made it, resolved to return it as it had been confided to me. To conclude a peace, to make it on the easiest terms, to re-establish order, finance, the army, and, if I could, in paying the ransom of the country deliver it from the presence of the invader, such was the task to be accomplished, the only one with which I occupied myself, and which I announced to the country. With the aid of France herself, which has never ceased, with the aid of God, who has been merciful toward us, the early difficulties have been sur-

mounted; we have seen order somewhat re-established and found ourselves at the gates of Paris.

I was able to gather together, from the remnant left from our losses, a military force of 150,000 men, and if it were sufficient to endeavor to wrench Paris from the grasp of the Commune, it was not sufficient to embrace all the large cities of France profoundly anxious for the maintenance of the republic, and coming to demand of us, with irritation and with defiance if it were for the monarchy that we contended. No, no, I said to them, it is for order, for order only, and acting in the full glare of day, I transmitted to the Tribune the response I had made; no one controverted me; every one voted the measure that I asked. Paris was plucked from the Commune, the assassins of hostages were punished as they deserved, in the name of the law and by the law alone, and France has breathed again.

On that day it was said to me at Tours at various times, You could accomplish everything. Alas, no! The half of my task only had been fulfilled; the enemy occupied the forts of Paris and ravaged our country from the Seine to the Meuse; deplorable conflicts might at any time break out and rekindle the war; and, finally, to withdraw, one by one, our provinces from the hands of our conquerors millions were necessary, and to have millions it was indispensable that credit should be re-established. Well, then, this credit I sought through the policy of pacification. Do you think that, if, audaciously contradicting myself on the morrow of the day when I declared that we contended for order and not for the monarchy, I had endeavored to reinstate it I should have secured the tranquillization of those spirits without which every financial operation was impossible? No, assuredly, no; on the contrary, by remaining faithful to the word given be-

fore the National Assembly, order-loving men being reassured by the destruction of the Commune, the Republicans becoming confident because they had not been deceived, a calm, unexpected, and which astonished Europe, supervened; I had need of six millions and I was offered more than forty, and I was able in two years to gain possession one by one of those occupied districts, to free the country, and to bring back the country to France.

There you have the facts, gentlemen, and if I have recalled them to you it is not to set forth the part I was able to take; no, the country itself is always pleased to bring them to my mind without my invoking its generous recollection.

These facts I recall that we may draw from them that instruction of which we have need, and which should decide the course we have to take for our assured safety.

Very well, gentlemen, the republic is voted; what must be done? I respond without hesitation; one single thing—for each and all to apply themselves frankly and loyally to secure its success. Whatever the future may have in store, there is no other duty than that.

I see many persons impatient to penetrate the future, who, forgetting the fable, imitate the ancient Greeks who went to consult the Sphinx. You all know it; how the treacherous animal listened to them without response, and when they had not solved the enigma, devoured them. Let us not seek an unproven future, and let us consider only duty clear, present, and undeniable. The republic is voted, and, under penalty of being considered the most inconsequent of men, it must, I repeat, be made to succeed.

To make the republic successful, I am told, is most difficult. Yes, I know it; but the monarchy, fallen three times in forty years, is that, then, easier? Without doubt it de-

pend upon the Monarchist party to augment this difficulty by their resistance, by their opposition open, or concealed, but by that would they render possible a monarchy? No: the same causes exist and will exist for a long time. Suppose that by an odious provision the house of Bourbon had but a single representative; there would remain the Napoleons whom we see on certain occasions voting with the Bourbons, but whom we shall never see reigning together. Now two dynasties are quite sufficient for civil war without a third being necessary. The white rose and the red suffice; there is no need to imagine a third.

In creating difficulties for the republic, I repeat, a monarchy is not made easier; chaos only is made possible, and calamities, this time, irreparable.

What is the real situation to-day? The republic is no longer a question of principle but one of application, and it is there that not only do the duties of all of us begin, but those of the government itself.

However, gentlemen, the elections are approaching, and it belongs to France to impress upon the government that unity of which it has absolute need; that, guarding itself from all illiberality—for illiberal governments are sterile—France, acting with discretion, may welcome all men who have taken a decided stand, protecting herself against those who, Republicans the day of the ballot, hasten on the morrow to explain their profession of fealty by the article of our constitutional law which stipulates for revision.

When approaching the ballot-boxes let France not forget that she has her financial system to complete, her military laws to revise,—because those already made are not all good,—her commercial treaties to renew in 1876, her educational system to develop along the lines of modern usage, and, if

to all these difficulties of system, so wearisome, come to be joined the perplexities arising from the division of parties which have rendered everything so difficult in the National Assembly, let France not fail to remember that she will end in that chaos of which I have spoken, and will have accomplished nothing save the loss of time in the eyes of Europe, where it is never lost, for to-day there is not a nation that is not occupying itself in making itself stronger and better governed. At that word Europe I hear more than one voice saying to me: Very well, when you have done all that, even though you have succeeded, you will always remain alone, for the republic will never in the world find allies! Permit me yet a few words more upon this subject which will, perhaps, not be out of place from my lips. The various parties represent Europe each in its own image, and, I sincerely beg their pardon, in thus representing her they often deceive themselves.

Europe to-day is perfectly rational because she is thoroughly enlightened, and in order to be in accord with her do you know what is necessary? A government as rational as she. Without doubt Europe has not always been what she is at present, but rest assured she is no longer the Europe of 1815 nor that of 1830. At that time upon all the thrones, in all the cabinets, there were princes and ministers who had, for forty years, warred against the French Revolution, and when suddenly in 1830 they saw it come forth from that tomb in which they believed it forever buried they were profoundly agitated and dismayed. I saw those times and they will never escape from my memory. To the imaginative it appeared that the honorable Robespierre, that the great and terrible Napoleon would shortly reappear and overturn all thrones. These vain terrors were quickly dissipated; but the

defiance and the bitterness remained. Europe kept herself armed and united against France even after having evacuated her territory through the action effective and patriotic of the Duc de Richelieu; she did not cease assembling in congress almost every year to maintain watch over events, and, at need, would have marched upon France to stifle the revolution which it was reported menaced all governments and all societies.

I ask you if there be anything similar to-day? Without doubt when anything of grave importance happens here with us, we are observed, for France has not ceased to be an object of great attention; but the unanimous opinion of all the governments is that the independence of France should be scrupulously respected, and that to her alone should be left the care of her own affairs.

In short, look about on all the thrones of Europe and you will see that there is not a prince who is not occupied in reforming his dominions, in their social, administrative, and political relations. All are consecrating themselves to this meritorious work with the exception of England, yes, England, who, having a long time ago given to herself liberty, has secured for herself forever the germ of all reforms possible and imaginable.

Such is the Europe of 1875 so different from that of 1815, and even of 1830. She has for forty years united against all reform, and at present has herself become a reformer. I beg those who believe that they draw near to her in resisting the spirit of the age to understand that instead of approaching they are withdrawing from her, and attracting, in place of her sympathy, perchance her censure.

It is insisted, and it is said to me: Yes, despite all that you may assert, these wise princes may be reformers but they will

never be republicans. I hasten to acknowledge it, and I never should pretend that there would be republicans upon the thrones of Russia, of Germany, of Austria, of Italy, and even of England. But do you believe that those sovereigns have their eyes closed when you think your own open? You do not like the republic and yet certain of you have voted for it from principle, from patriotism. Very well, do you think that Europe is not aware of all that you know, and that the reasons that have influenced you are not clear to her? No, no, there was nothing else possible, and she approves that which you have done. She smiles when such and such preferences are ascribed to her. She has neither love nor hate; she cares only for peace; she is bound to it by interest, by humanity, by largeness of views; and there is a certain change that you suppose ought to be agreeable, that she sees with great disquietude, because she believes it neither sensible nor desirable.

As to France, Europe respects her, interests herself in her, and desires her re-establishment because she feels that France is indispensable to European equilibrium. Do you desire a proof of this? This spring, from some unknown cause, certain persons became much agitated, fear of war took possession of their imaginations, and then did Europe show herself hostile or indifferent to France? Far from it! A cry for peace went out from all governments, and peace has been maintained by the weight of universal opinion. An alliance is talked of: is not that the real alliance, the stable alliance, and the only one possible in the present state of things? Without doubt if by an alliance is understood the concert of two or three Powers united for the attainment of a certain end, especial, interested, oh, without doubt France is not of it! and do you wish me to tell you that I know of none similar in Europe to-day. Under this designation no one is allied

to any other, but the whole world is united for the peace of the nations; and this truly holy alliance embraces and protects all interests, and for yet a long time will be the only one desirable, the only one possible.

I resume, gentlemen, these reflections, too extended, perhaps, but which your presence and the memories thereby invoked have caused to flow forth from my mind and from my heart, and I declare to you: Destiny, that is to say, a long chain of circumstances (wherein enter mistakes no longer to be remembered), destiny has decided! No one for five years has been able to re-establish the monarchy, and the National Assembly, although monarchical, has voted the republic. Let us be consistent and seek to make of this republic a government orderly, wise, fruitful, and to that end let us demand of France by future elections, that she impress upon the government that unity of views of which she has such vital need.

Let us pray above all, of this dear and noble France, that she allow neither depreciation nor insult of the immortal revolution of '89 against which so many efforts are to-day directed, and which is our purest and greatest glory among nations, for it is that which for three quarters of a century has caused the entrance of justice into the legislation of all peoples.

When, in short, the whites were enfranchised in Europe by the hand of a wise and generous prince, when in America the blacks beheld their shackles broken by the hand of a great nation, it was because the spirit of '89 breathed upon those regions so far away.

Certain it is that we had attained the height of our military glory, and this glory, for a moment in eclipse, will never perish; but, if military glory is a sun that at times veils itself

in clouds, the glory of civilization is a sun that never ceases the splendor of its shining. It is that, and I have been able to distinguish it among foreign nations, it is that which, always resplendent, even at the moment of our greatest reverses, aroused in our favor the sympathy of all nations, even of those the least well-disposed toward us. Let us then unite in preserving this noble past of the national patrimony, and, in so far as it concerns me, it will always have in its defence the efforts of a life drawing to its close, but which until its latest day will remain faithful to all the noble interests of reason and of humanity.

[Special translation by Mary Emerson Adams.]