



*Engraved by George Cooke.*

THE  
HISTORIC GALLERY  
OF  
PORTRAITS AND PAINTINGS;  
AND  
*BIOGRAPHICAL REVIEW:*

Containing  
A BRIEF ACCOUNT OF THE LIVES OF THE MOST  
CELEBRATED MEN,  
*IN EVERY AGE AND COUNTRY;*  
AND  
GRAPHIC IMITATIONS OF THE FINEST SPECIMENS  
OF  
THE ARTS;  
*ANCIENT AND MODERN.*  
WITH REMARKS, CRITICAL AND EXPLANATORY.

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Tamen utile quid sit  
Prospiciunt aliquando.

*Juv. Sat. 6, lin. 319.*

Docti rationem artis intelligunt, indocti, voluptatem.

*Quint. lib. ix. 4.*

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## CONDORCET.

**AFTER** Voltaire, Montesquieu, J. J. Rousseau, Buffon, Helvetius, Condillac, Mably, Thomas, Diderot, and D'Alembert, the name of Condorcet places itself naturally on the list of writers who reflected honor on the eighteenth century. Inferior to many of them with respect to the talent for which they are particularly characterised, he nearly equals the whole in those rare endowments of mind which are common to men of genius, and surpasses them in the extent, the variety, and the accuracy of his acquirements. If he be then, in the order of time, *the last of this illustrious race*, he is without doubt not the least remarkable. Condorcet was at once a Geometrician, a Philosopher, a Man of Letters, a public Writer, and an Economist, in the true sense of the word, which indicates a science, and a sect; and what particularly distinguished him is, that this combination of extraordinary resources was constantly directed to a single object, the amelioration of the lot of the human race by the diffusion of knowledge. He is indebted perhaps to his friend, the celebrated Turgot, for the first idea of the most noble, and the most consoling of all the systems of philosophy, of that which rests upon the opinion of the most indefinite perfection of the human mind: and he really created this system, since he first built it upon a solid basis, strengthened it with all the support of experience, and deduced from thence certain results.

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The love of truth was the most prominent trait in his character; the desire of being serviceable to the cause of humanity, the principal motive of all his labours as a man of science, and a man of letters. Persuaded that the vices and the misfortunes of men are the fruits of social institutions, he proposed to himself in some sort to examine the whole in their aggregate and in their smallest details, to shew from thence their baneful tendency, and to point out, at the same time, the means of reforming them. To fulfil the task he had imposed upon himself, it was necessary for him to know, and to attempt every thing: no one therefore joined to such a mass of knowledge a mind more eminently just, lively, flexible, extensive, and profound; no one took a more comprehensive view of the most arduous questions; and no one, at the same time, attacked with greater courage, and under more diversity of forms, so many prejudices, combated so many errors, and unmasked so many hypocrites and charlatans, denounced and pursued so many interests that opposed the public good.

Condorcet was one of the most zealous partizans and one of the most illustrious victims of a Revolution, which excited at first so many pleasing expectations, and terminated in so many disappointments. His conduct manifested that he then lost sight of that system of philosophical tardiness, so much recommended by Turgot; that he forgot what he himself established in his last work, that the truths of theory are necessarily modified in practice: he wished to overstrain every thing, and contribute to destroy every thing. But whether his death suffice or not to absolve him in the eyes of posterity from the errors of his political existence, his literary life must ever entitle him to the warmest eulogiums.

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Marie-Jean-Antoine-Nicholas-Caritat de Condorcet was born at Ribemont, in Picardy, on the 17th of September, 1743. Educated under the eyes of his uncle, the Bishop of Lezieux, he preferred, although far less lucrative, the difficult career of the sciences to various professions in which his birth would have promised him, at much less expence, the most certain advantages. He at first devoted himself, with enthusiasm, to the Mathematics, and at the age of 21 published a treatise on *Integral Calculations*, which opened to him a little afterwards the doors of the Academy of the Sciences: this he entered in 1768. A bon mot of the geometrician, *Fontaine*, sufficiently indicates that the debut of young Condorcet was uncommonly happy. *J'ai cru un moment*, said he, *qu'il valait mieux que moi; j'en etais jaloux, mais il m'a rassuré depuis.* It is certain that his incidental occupations prevented him from carrying into his mathematical researches that perseverance and detail, which would now alone secure its success. His inclination nevertheless carried him to a science, which from his very outset he had enriched with important remarks: and if time and patience were wanting to give to his *Analytical Essays* the degree of perfection which might be expected, he still accomplished his principal object, in proving by ingenious applications and by evident proofs, that the science of Calculation established the certainty of the moral and political sciences. Such was exclusively the object of his *Memoires sur le calcul des improbabilités*, and of his work entitled, *Plan de la Mathematique sociale*,

Condorcet has likewise evinced, that to the sagacity and depth of the Geometrician, he united the intelligence of the Philosopher, and the talents of the Critic. The Eulogies of the Academicians, who died before 1699,

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and in a particular manner the fine eulogium on Pascal, announced a successor worthy of Fontenelle. Fouchi, who, after Marian, occupied without filling the place of that celebrated man, associated with Condorcet in 1773, and three years after relinquished to him entirely the functions of perpetual secretary. Become, in this quality, the historian of the sciences, and of those who consecrate their lives in extending their boundary, Condorcet so completely answered the expectations excited by his early works, that his numerous and excellent eulogies will be ever one of the most solid pillars of his reputation. Equal and even superior to Fontenelle in the only point in which he can be compared to him—the extent and the variety of his knowledge—Condorcet was capable of judging of his talent, and of the circumstances in which he found himself, and was only disposed to imitate a man, who, endowed with a prodigious mind, had done well all that could be accomplished in his time, by doing likewise well all that very different times permitted him to do. Those who give the preference to Condorcet ought then to admit, that frequently more rich in his subjects, and always more liberal in his thoughts, he has had the good fortune to render to the sciences a more solemn and more noble homage. As to those who affected to place him greatly below his predecessor, we much doubt whether they were capable of appreciating Fontenelle. One circumstance, which reflects honour on the character of Condorcet, delayed until the year 1782 his admission into the French Academy: he refused to pronounce the eulogium of the Duke de la Vrillière, and this refusal, which drew upon him the hatred of Maurepas, induced him not to become a candidate for that distinction until after the death of that old minister. Before that epocha he had presented to that body an *Eloge de l'Hospital*, which deserved, though

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it did not gain the prize; after which, he published his *Life of Turgot*. These two books are alone sufficient to place him on the rank of the first political writers. The latter especially is perhaps the best book that a statesman can study; it is the genius of a great minister, interpreted by the genius of the friend, the most capable of understanding it: it is a rapid, but perfect picture of every thing which can be done for the happiness of a great people, by the sole influence of the discoveries of wisdom and of time.

In 1789, Condorcet paid to Voltaire a tribute, flattering beyond all bounds. He published the life of that extraordinary man, and thus terminated the edition of his works, which he had enriched with a variety of notes, as curious as instructive. Our limits will not permit us to cite all the works, which, during twenty years, Condorcet composed upon literature, philosophy, general politics, and public economy. The last science, which he regarded in some sort as the result of all the others, had for him a particular attraction. He discussed its most difficult points, and is, beyond dispute, the man of his time in France who the best understood it, and who reduced it to the most simple and certain principles.

Notwithstanding so many titles to the confidence of his fellow-citizens, Condorcet was not chosen a member of the Constituent Assembly. It is possible that this circumstance had considerable influence on the political opinions he professed, and upon the conduct which he subsequently displayed. In his numerous writings, he appears at first to have only desired the reform, which all France solicited; but after the flight and arrest of the king, he was the first to pronounce the word *Republic*,

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and to require the abolition of royalty. From that moment he became one of the most distinguished members of the party, who, strengthened afterwards by the leaders of the deputation of the Gironde, prepared, in the legislative assembly, all the misfortunes of France. According to the general law of all factions, Condorcet should have made to his new friends the sacrifice of his old ones. It would have been painful to him, no doubt, especially when he saw himself reduced to the degradation of permitting men, whom he had long esteemed, and whom he ought always to have respected, to be insulted under his name.

It is well known in the Convention what was the fate of the *Girondins*. The 31st of May, 1793, deprived them of a power, which they had never exercised but in a precarious manner, and caused it to pass into the hands of the most atrocious and the vilest of men. Condorcet was not at first included among the victims of that fatal day: but he had the courage to reprobate it to his constituents, and to write against the plan of the constitution which followed it. A decree of accusation soon passed against him, and a little time after he was outlawed. A female, no less remarkable for her tenderness than her courage, received him into her house, and concealed him for eight months in Paris, at the risk of her own life. It was in this asylum, in the most critical situation possible, under the very sword of assassins, that Condorcet, without books, without notes, without any other assistance than the force of his own genius, the clearness of his conceptions, and the tenacity of his memory, composed the astonishing *Esquisse d'un tableau historique des progres de l'Esprit humain*, which was not published until after his death. Why was he not able, by filling up this magnifi-



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cent outline, to complete a work which he had so long meditated! But the dread of a strict and secret inquiry, which would have proved fatal to his benefactress, forced him from his retreat. "*I must leave you,*" he said to her, "*I am an outlaw.*" "*Si vous etes hors la loi,*" was her reply, "*vous n'etes pas hors l'humanite!*" Notwithstanding this proof of her disinterestedness and intrepidity, Condorcet withdrew himself from her protection, and wandered for a time about the environs of Paris. He then went to a friend at Fontenau, but he was not at home. In this state of suspense, he passed one night in a quarry, and another in an open field; the third day he was arrested at Clamart, and conveyed to a prison in Bourg-la-Reine, where he swallowed poison to escape the destiny which awaited him. He died on the 28th of March, 1794, in his fifty-first year.

Condorcet had associated with all the celebrated men of his time. He was the particular friend of Voltaire, of Turgot, and of d'Alembert. The latter well delineated his character, when he said of him *c'est un Volcan couvert de neige*. No one, in fact, had a more forbidding exterior, and a soul more ardent. His character was firm, but indulgent. He despised all establishments—he pitied and excused mankind—he was a good husband and a good father—he esteemed talents, took pleasure in encouraging and in developing them; assisted with enthusiasm, with affection, and with a peculiar delicacy, all those who were able, in their turn, to benefit the sciences and philosophy.

His manners were unassuming, his temper equal, and his society pleasing. Timid, and even embarrassed in a numerous circle, it was in a private one that he displayed

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the superiority of his acquirements, and the extent of his knowledge. A few words which he uttered, afford ample testimony of his candour and rectitude. He was asked if he knew the particulars of the difference between Rousseau and Diderot. "Non," said he, "*mais Diderot étoit le meilleur des hommes, et quand on se brouillait avec lui on avait tort.—Mais vous? j'avais tort.*"