

31.
On the
fortunes of
science dur-
ing the Re-
volution and
the First
Empire.

Cuvier had also a true historical sense, which enabled him to trace the connection of science with political history, with literature, with the fine and useful arts. And he helps to answer a question which to us is of paramount interest, How did science fare during the great cataclysm of the Revolution? how under the reactionary despotism of the First Empire? Before attempting to reply to these questions in the light of subsequent and general European history, I will select a few passages from Cuvier which throw light upon these points:¹—

“There is always a revolution required in order to change habits which have become general, and the most necessary revolutions do not take place without some circumstance, which is sometimes long delayed. We have been able to see how in such a case everything furthers the sciences, even the delays and contrarieties which they seem to suffer under.

“The events which disturbed the world, and which for natural science temporarily dried up the sources of its riches,² obliged it to return to itself, and to make a new study of what it possessed, more fruitful than the most

a generation later the British Association undertook to do, and what in Germany the many “Jahresberichte” do nowadays. See his “Analyse des Travaux,” &c., ‘Mém. de l’Institut,’ vol. ix. p. 53, and his celebrated ‘Rapport historique sur le Progrès des Sciences naturelles depuis 1789,’ Paris, 1810.

¹ ‘Éloges historiques,’ vol. iii. p. 456, 1824.

² This refers to the isolation of France during the war and the Continental blockade, which deprived

it of foreign imports and the scientific collections of foreign specimens; see also ‘Éloges,’ vol. i. p. 9; vol. iii. p. 202: “Quand la jalousie des peuples nous privait des produits étrangers, la chimie les faisait éclore de notre sol.” “Le conseil des mines établi en 1793, lorsque l’interruption de tout rapport avec l’étranger fit sentir le besoin de tirer parti de notre territoire a donné à ces sortes de recherches une impulsion toute nouvelle” (‘Rapport,’ p. 178).