

## MOREAU DE SAINT MERY AND HIS FRENCH FRIENDS IN THE AMERICAN PHILOSOPHICAL SOCIETY.

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Born at Fort Royal, Island of Martinique in 1750, dying at Paris in 1819, Moreau de St. Mery had a career characteristic of the stormy period through which he passed. Of a good family of Poitou, his father's early death left him with little means. At nineteen he came to Paris, became a King's gendarme, studied law, letters and mathematics. Returning to Martinique he became a lawyer at Cap Français, and in 1780 a member of the Upper Council of Saint Domingo. He classified the laws of the French Colonies of the Antilles; discovered and restored the tomb of Columbus, and sent many scientific papers and many curious archeological articles to the American Philosophical Society, and was elected a member in 1789.

Returning to Paris as a member of the Constituent Assembly from Martinique, he was warmly welcomed by the scientific world in recognition of his frequent contributions to scientific societies.

When the French Revolution broke out, he was elected President of the Electors of Paris, twice addressed Louis XVI. on their behalf, and was fond of boasting that for three days he had been King of Paris, and helped to secure for Lafayette the command of the National Guard.

Elected Deputy from Martinique in 1790, he brought many colonial matters before the Constituent Assembly, and in 1791 became a member of the Judicial Council.

Wounded in an attack by a maddened crowd, he took refuge in a country village in Normandy, escaped the guillotine and came to the United States. After a short stay in New York, he settled in Philadelphia in 1793, opened a book store at Front and Walnut Streets, and became active in the Philosophical Society, attended its meetings regularly, contributing papers, making gifts to its collections,



introducing many of his fellow exiles, some of them soon elected to the Society. Returning to France in 1799 and making use of his distant relationship to Josephine, wife of Bonaparte, he was employed by Bonaparte in the preparation of a Maritime Code. Appointed to the Council of State in 1800, he was sent in 1801 to Parma as Administrator of the Duchy of Parma, fulfilling his duties with moderation, but showing a lack of firmness and energy that cost him his position, and the enmity of Napoleon, who sent Junot to replace him, and to end a threatened revolution by fire and sword.

When he lost his place in the Council of State, he told Napoleon that his honesty need not be feared, for it was not contagious in that body. The Empress Josephine helped him, and afterwards he became historiographer of the Marine Department.

He sold to the French government, for a pension from Louis XVIII., his large collection of historical papers, documents, maps, etc., often mentioned by recent historians. One unkind critic, who worked at making a calendar of his papers, says he sold to the government not only the copies he had made, but many originals which he had taken from the files in his care. His printed works include one in six volumes, on "The Laws and Constitutions of the French Colonies in the West Indies from 1550 to 1785." Louis XVI. ordered a copy to be placed in each French colony in America.

His "History of Saint Domingo" was translated by William Cobbett, then living in Philadelphia, and his list of subscribers included many notable Americans then in office and a large number of French exiles in the United States.

He translated and published a pamphlet on "The Prisons of Philadelphia," by Rochefoucauld Liancourt, reprinted in Paris and in Holland, and in one of Rochefoucauld Liancourt's bulky six volumes of his "Travels in the United States." He had the honor of an eloge by Fournier Pescay printed in Paris in 1819 and the biographical dictionaries give the dates of his various publications, of the offices he held and make mention of his best service: the collection and preservation of an immense number of papers, maps, etc., relating to the French colonies in America, from their origin down to the French Revolution. Calendars of parts of them have been



printed by the Canadian Archive office and by the Wisconsin Historical Society and in France.

His shop at Front and Walnut was the rendezvous of all the notable French exiles then in Philadelphia, and he entertained them very modestly,—cooking his own simple meals in his rear office, and sharing his good wine with them. He figures in the “Memoirs” of Talleyrand and in the “Travels” of Rochefoucauld and in the books on the United States by Brissot and Volney and other French writers.

He translated and published two big quarto volumes on China by Van Braam, who had resided in that country as a member of a Dutch embassy. The book was dedicated to Washington. Van Braam became a merchant in Charleston in 1783 and was naturalized in 1784, then made his voyage to China, returned to Philadelphia in 1796, bringing with him several Chinese servants, and a large collection of paintings, drawings, maps and curios, which he exhibited in Philadelphia for several months, then kept in his house near Bristol, “China Hall” on the Delaware. In the appendix to the second volume of his book, there is a detailed account of his collection, filling many pages. He too was elected a member of the Philosophical Society in 1797.

Moreau de St. Mery printed a catalogue of the contents of his book store, of 72 pages, including many books in English, French, Italian, Spanish, Latin, German, Dutch, maps, music, and advertised “a general business of stationers, booksellers and dealers in engravings, a printing office and book bindery, to fill orders for books from Europe, deal in every kind of business on commission, and will not spare any care in studying to accomplish their enterprise intended to propagate and diffuse knowledge,” and at the end of the catalogue of books, etc., offered for sale, “particular goods out of the booksellers’ station, everything belonging to the Fleecy hosiery manufacture of New York, as foot and ankle socks, goutty mittens and stockings, shirts with and without sleeves, drawers, muffs, etc., elastic garters and gallices of different sizes.” Perhaps his field was too large, and the public not appreciative, for he failed for \$5,000, and Philadelphia lost the advantage of such a bookseller, printer and publisher, as well as philosopher, author and translator.



No doubt the same industry and energy led him to make the large collection known by his name, now in Paris, of original documents, copies, maps, etc., filling 287 volumes, bought by the French government, and now in its great archives for the use of students of colonial French history.

That St. Mery was well thought of in Philadelphia, during his residence here is attested by the long list of subscribers to his book on Saint Domingo, including Vice-President John Adams, Adet, the French minister, Benjamin Franklin Bache, William Bingham, Thomas Bradford, Samuel Breck, Rev. Dr. Collin, Alexander James Dallas, P. S. Duponceau, Dupont, of Wilmington, Rufus King, Dr. Logan, Noailles, Timothy Pickering, Rochambeau, Talleyrand, John Vaughan, Volney, and many notable French exiles both in Philadelphia and elsewhere in the United States. Many of them were elected members of the American Philosophical Society, and its minutes show that its meetings were frequently attended by Talleyrand, Rochefoucauld, Volney, Van Braam, and its library has many books, the gifts of St. Mery and his fellow exiles.

In a recent biography of Talleyrand we are told that when he landed here in 1794, it was the finest city in the United States, full of life, everywhere new buildings and work on them going on, the streets full of elegant equipages, crowded with men of business, workmen and sailors.

Chateaubriand speaks of the beauty of the Quakeresses. Every stranger from Europe was welcomed by the wealthy merchants,—life was very expensive, board \$8 to \$12 a week, without fire, light or wine; a negro servant cost \$10 to \$12 a month even with food and washing. Emigrés of all political creeds found a Noah's ark of refuge in Philadelphia. Talleyrand's arrival was quite an event; he found old friends, old soldiers of Lafayette, fellow members of the constituent assembly, among them Blacon, who had been deputy from Dauphine and one of the intermediaries between Mirabeau and the King. Hamilton gave him a warm welcome, but Fauchet, the French Minister, prevented Washington from receiving him, and Washington wrote to Lord Lansdowne, explaining why his letter of introduction did not enable him to meet Talleyrand. However, he



did not busy himself with politics, but at once began speculating in land, then the great money-making business. The Scioto Company was then all the vogue in Paris. The Holland Land Company was buying right and left. LaForest, the French Consul General, had bought an estate in Virginia in 1792. Noailles and Omer Talon in association with Robert Morris had bought large tracts of land on the Susquehanna for a colony of French royalist exiles, offering land, which had cost them 15 sous an acre for 6 francs, as a refuge from France.

Talleyrand urged Mme. deStael and his friends in Europe to send money for investment, and he proposed buying land in Maine from General Knox. He told Moreau de St. Mery that he had a plan for settling in Louisiana, and was a frequent visitor at St. Mery's book store, meeting there his old friends and fellow exiles,—Fayettists, Girondists, Constituents, Jacobins, Royalists, one of them, Count de Moré, says "wandering like ghosts, full of regrets, lost hopes and disappointment over their shattered political careers."

Moreau de St. Mery often spoke of the three days in 1789 when as president of the Electoral College he was King of Paris. But while the others were bewailing their hard fate, Moreau was busy with his shop and his books, and Talleyrand wrote to Paris of schemes for revictualling Paris, starved by the Reign of Terror, crying for bread, by ships loaded with rice, grain and fish, named the best merchants to deal with, and on the strength of his services, secured the long-sought permission to return to France, and there began that career of success which carried him safely through the Republic, the Directory, the Empire, the Bourbon restoration and into the reign of Louis Philippe.

Other Frenchmen had planned a great French colony,—twenty-four men, mostly young noblemen, had joined in forwarding Joel Barlow's scheme of a great settlement on the Ohio,—the Scioto Company was organized, to buy 24,000 acres,—d'Epresmenil, their leader, lost his life on the guillotine; Marnesia, after a tour through America, returned to France, and with Lally Tollendal, Mounier and Malouet, lost touch with their colony in the midst of the great events in their own country.



One of Moreau de St. Mery's friends and visitors, Rochefoucauld Liancourt, wrote an account of the prisons of Philadelphia, which was printed by Moreau in French and in English in Philadelphia, (he was the translator), and later it was published in Paris, and in Dutch in Holland, and later still was made part of one of his six volumes describing his travels in the United States.

Rochefoucauld spent four years in the United States and describes in great detail his experiences in the northwest and north, in Canada, in Maine, in the south, and in New York, New Jersey and Pennsylvania.

Talleyrand from Philadelphia wrote to Mme. de Genlis, "Rochefoucauld is here, making notes, asking information, writing, and more a questioner than Sterne's curious traveller; he wants to see and know everything," in his eager search for the truth. He met Knox, Sullivan, Jefferson, John Adams, Priestley, Livingston and Kosciusko. He appealed to Washington to intercede for the release of Lafayette from Olmutz. His inquiries included politics, constitutions, judicial organizations, army, agriculture, industries, statistics, charities, education. In Georgia he studied cotton and indigo plantations; he condemned slavery and argued for the education of the negroes to prepare them for freedom; in Niagara and the great forests he foresaw the sources of future industries. He established in France on his return societies like the Pennsylvania Prison Society, and took home much that he had learned in the United States, which he introduced in France, useful reforms that made him a real philanthropist.

Another French settler in or near Philadelphia, Pierre Legaux, was elected a member of the American Philosophical Society in 1787. A Counsellor of Parliament, a member of the Academy of Arts and Sciences and of several foreign academies, employed in the French West Indies, he came to Philadelphia about 1786 and made his mark as a representative of French culture and scientific ability and by his charm of manner. He bought land on the Schuylkill near Conshohocken and planted vineyards. Washington and Mifflin and other notable men visited them and approved his enterprise. Jefferson, Genet, Brissot, Audubon, Wistar, were among those whose visits



and encouragement he recorded in his diary. He tried to get Jefferson to recommend to Congress protection for his infant industry. In 1791 he offered his country house to Washington as a home during the session of Congress and "hoped the country which owes its liberty to your wisdom and military talent will owe her wine to your generosity."

In 1793 the Legislature of Pennsylvania chartered a company to promote the cultivation of vines, with a capital of \$20,000 in \$2 shares; in 1800 the stock was fixed by a law passed by the Legislature at \$1 a share down, and the balance of the \$20 in easy instalments. Later he advertised that apprentices, black or white, would be received, with terms of payment, and the promise of a gift of vines that they could take home and start the industry wherever they lived. In 1802 the company received its charter and organized. Among the stockholders were Thomas McKean, Robert Morris, Genet, Duponceau, Stephen Girard, Alexander Hamilton, Aaron Burr, Jared Ingersoll, Muhlenberg, Bartram and other notable people of the 385 subscribers to the stock of the Pennsylvania Vine Co. Legaux was elected superintendent at a salary of \$600 a year with residence and living at the farm. Expenses soon outran receipts, the managers quarreled with Legaux, litigation brought ruin, and he, harassed, worried, disappointed, became a mere servant where he had once been a genial host, finally succumbed and broken in spirit died in 1827, and was buried at Barren Hill. Thus sadly closed another one of the frequent failures of French enterprises in the United States.<sup>1</sup>

Moreau de St. Mery kept a journal, cited by Pichot in his "*Souvenirs intimes de Talleyrand*," in which he speaks of Talleyrand's frequent visits to his book store, meeting there Noailles, Rochefoucauld, Omer Talon, Volney and others less famous.

While the host dined meagerly on rice and milk cooked in his store, Talleyrand enjoyed drinking his own old Madeira, and was the life of the party. When Blacon called him monseigneur all the company burst into a hearty laugh. Talleyrand urged Napoleon to erect a statue of Washington in Paris and to give France the

<sup>1</sup> *Philadelphia Press*, September 9, 1899, article by Samuel Gordon Smythe.



same perfect religious freedom that he saw practiced in the United States and he also advised the sale of Louisiana to the United States as a method of strengthening the ties between the two countries.

One would like to see the journal kept by Moreau de St. Mery during his residence in Philadelphia. Did he in his palmy days as a member of the Council of State under the Empire or in the time of his modest clerkship in the Marine Department, meet his old visitors at his book store in Philadelphia, Louis Philippe, Talleyrand and Rochefoucauld and Volney and the other exiles now restored to their old prosperity, and did they recall the meetings of the American Philosophical Society and their attendance and share in them? His large collection of historical papers, now rescued from oblivion by calendars by and for the American students of history, perpetuates his name and memory and services, more than do the volumes he wrote and printed and published at his book store at Front and Walnut Streets.

The latest historian of the French Revolution, Aulard, frequently mentions Moreau de St. Mery and his share in it, and refers to the collection of historical documents. His name does not figure in Dr. Mitchell's capital novel, "The Red City," with its picturesque account of the French exiles living here in the closing years of the eighteenth century, nor in Kipling's picturesque story of Philadelphia at that time. All the more reason therefore for an attempt to recall the memory of the French exiles who were members of the American Philosophical Society and especially of that one who figures most often and most usefully in its records of that time, Moreau de St. Mery.

Of the other French exiles during their residence in Philadelphia, there is occasional mention, as for instance in Talleyrand's "Memoirs." His two papers on the United States and the relations between France and this country, read before the French Institute, were no doubt largely inspired by what he heard at the meetings of the American Philosophical Society, and his share in the sale of Louisiana to the United States helped to secure that vast territory for the future growth of the young republic and its ultimate great development.



In the report of M. E. Richard on the Moreau de St. Mery collection, printed in the supplement to Dr. Brymner's Report on Canadian Archives for 1899 (Ottawa, 1901), he says it was stored in the archives of the Marine at Versailles up to 1887, then removed to the Ministère des Colonies, and stored in the attic of the Louvre. They were then fearful of the great risk of fire, but were considering the removal to other quarters.

In the reports of 1883-85 and 1887, mention is made of 287 volumes in the collection of Moreau de St. Mery, some forty of which relate to Canada, others to Louisiana and the French islands of America. These belonged formerly to the Colonial Archives of the Marine; of the collection headed Moreau de St. Mery seventeen volumes contain description, etc., of the colonies, including a series of memorials on Canada, 3 volumes are on the religious missions of Canada, 12 volumes on Newfoundland, 12 volumes containing royal instructions to governors, and decrees relating to Canada, 119 registers on Canada, Acadia, etc., 6 volumes on civil status of Canada, 34 volumes on Louisbourg; an analysis was made of 17 volumes of the Moreau de St. Mery collection for the Canadian Archives.

It is open to the objection that "there is no strict order followed in the compilation; it contains but a limited number of documents, or even extracts from documents. It is difficult to understand the dominant idea of this collection."

This collection is, nevertheless, most valuable, for it contains a considerable number of important papers, both transcripts and originals, not to be found elsewhere.

On p. 5 of Richard's Report, in a footnote, it is said Moreau de St. Mery, born in Martinique in 1750, studied law in Paris and practiced in St. Domingo, where he became a member of the Superior Council of the Island. Entrusted by Louis XVI. with the compiling of a colonial code, he published in Paris "*Les Lois et Constitutions des Colonies Françaises de l'Amerique sous le Vent.*" Representing Martinique in the Constituent Assembly, he drafted the report of the Committee on the Colonies. Forced by political events to leave France, he fled to Philadelphia, where he remained from 1793 to



1798, employing himself as a bookseller and publisher. He there published his "Description de la partie Espagnole de St. Domingue," which he signed "Moreau de St. Mery, member of the Philosophical Society of Phila." He also translated or edited foreign works, and among them VanBraam's "Voyage to China." Having returned to France on the 18 Brumaire, he was, through his relationship with Josephine de Beauharnais, appointed in 1800 to the position of Historiographer of the Marine. Napoleon appointed him to the Council of State, in view of his knowledge of colonial affairs. In 1802 he was administrator of Parma and Guastalla, but lost favor and was removed in 1806. He died poor and in receipt of a pension from Louis XVIII.

While entrusted with a mission in St. Domingo, as publisher in Philadelphia and historiographer in Paris, we find him everywhere an observer and a worker, taking notes on everything. His collection of manuscripts comprises 287 large volumes, and was purchased by the state after his death, that is to say the government had to pay not only for the transcripts he had caused to be made, but even for the originals he had appropriated.

Persons who take a special interest in the social and religious condition of the country, the disputes and conflicts between the authorities will find in the Moreau de St. Mery collection far more than they could find in any other series.

That Moreau de St. Mery did a good work in preserving and making his collection is shown by the statement (in Richard's Report, p. 8, etc.), that the Archives of the Ministry of Marine were so utterly neglected that the precious papers were used during five weeks of the winter in 1793, as fuel to feed the stoves of the post of the Garde Nationale in the building where the archives were kept, and in 1830 an employee gave up the archives to pillage and sold, by weight for his own profit, whole piles of documents, bought by autograph collectors.

Thanks to the suggestion of Prof. Cleveland Abbe, I found in the *Monthly Weather Review* for February, 1906 (Washington, Weather Bureau, 1907), at pp. 64, etc., in a notice by C. Fitzhugh Talman of the U. S. Weather Bureau, the following: "Foremost among the early



writers upon the island of Santo Domingo, was Mederic Louis Elie Moreau de St. Mery, who produced three voluminous works upon the French possessions in the West Indies. Born at Fort Royal, Martinique, in 1750, he passed his early manhood in Haiti, and settled at the then capitol of the colony, Cap Français (now Cap Haitien). He held an important office in the administration of the colony, and also, under a commission from Louis 16th, travelled extensively through the French West Indies, collecting material for a work published in 1785, under the title "*Lois et Constitutions des Colonies Françaises de l'Amerique sous le vent, de 1550 à 1785.*" Returning to France he took an active part in the French Revolution, until obliged to flee from his political enemies to the United States. It was during a period of exile in the latter country that he published two works descriptive of the island of Santo Domingo, one devoted to the Spanish part of the island, the other to the French part. Published by himself in Philadelphia in 1797, it was republished in Paris in 1875 by Morgand in 2 vols. 8vo. It is to this day regarded by the Haitians as the highest authority upon the physical geography of their country and is quoted at length in the latest Haitian gazeteer (Ronzier Dic. geog. et admin. d. Haiti, Paris, 1899). Mr. Talman reproduces St. Mery's chart of the Island, and a full abstract of his description of its meteorology.

Moreau de St. Mery was active in the Philadelphia Society of Cap Français, and in the Library of the American Philosophical Society there is the 1st vol. of its Proceedings,—no 2nd or later volume is preserved,—it shows that Moreau de St. Mery was the leading spirit in its activities. That his meteorological observations of San Domingo during his residence there in the eighteenth century, should be found of value today, is but another proof of his useful activity. His chief monument however is his collection, bearing his name, of original documents on the French in America, and by it he is now made known to students in the pages of Aulard, Brynmner, Thwaites and other historians.





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