

WALTER SCOTT

LIFE OF NAPOLEON
BONAPARTE. VOLUME I

Walter Scott
Life of Napoleon
Bonaparte. Volume I

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Life of Napoleon Bonaparte, Volume I.:

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Life of Napoleon

Bonaparte, Volume I

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Sir Walter Scott

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LIFE OF NAPOLEON

Pocket Edition

VOL. I

NAPOLEON BONAPARTE

1802

LIFE OF

NAPOLEON BONAPARTE

By SIR WALTER SCOTT, BAR^T

VOL. 1

ADVERTISEMENT

The extent and purpose of this Work, have, in the course of its progress, gradually but essentially changed from what the Author originally proposed. It was at first intended merely as a brief and popular abstract of the life of the most wonderful man, and the most extraordinary events, of the last thirty years; in short, to emulate the concise yet most interesting history of the great British Admiral, by the Poet-Laureate of Britain.¹ The Author was partly induced to undertake the task, by having formerly drawn up for a periodical work – "The Edinburgh Annual Register" – the history of the two great campaigns of 1814 and 1815; and three volumes were the compass assigned to the proposed work. An introductory volume, giving a general account of the Rise and Progress of the French Revolution, was thought necessary; and the single volume, on a theme of such extent, soon swelled into two.

As the Author composed under an anonymous title, he could neither seek nor expect information from those who had been actively engaged in the changeful scenes which he was attempting to record; nor was his object more ambitious than that of compressing and arranging such information as the ordinary authorities afforded. Circumstances, however, unconnected with

¹ Southey's *Life of Nelson*, 2 vols. fcap. 8vo. 1813.

the undertaking, induced him to lay aside an *incognito*, any farther attempt to preserve which must have been considered as affectation; and since his having done so, he has been favoured with access to some valuable materials, most of which have now, for the first time, seen the light. For these he refers to the Appendix at the close of the Work, where the reader will find several articles of novelty and interest. Though not at liberty, in every case, to mention the quarter from which his information has been derived, the Author has been careful not to rely upon any which did not come from sufficient authority. He has neither grubbed for anecdotes in the libels and private scandal of the time, nor has he solicited information from individuals who could not be impartial witnesses in the facts to which they gave evidence. Yet the various public documents and private information which he has received, have much enlarged his stock of materials, and increased the whole work to more than twice the size originally intended.

On the execution of his task, it becomes the Author to be silent. He is aware it must exhibit many faults; but he claims credit for having brought to the undertaking a mind disposed to do his subject as impartial justice as his judgment could supply. He will be found no enemy to the person of Napoleon. The term of hostility is ended when the battle has been won, and the foe exists no longer. His splendid personal qualities – his great military actions and political services to France – will not, it is hoped, be found depreciated in the narrative. Unhappily, the

Author's task involved a duty of another kind, the discharge of which is due to France, to Britain, to Europe, and to the world. If the general system of Napoleon has rested upon force or fraud, it is neither the greatness of his talents, nor the success of his undertakings, that ought to stifle the voice or dazzle the eyes of him who adventures to be his historian. The reasons, however, are carefully summed up where the Author has presumed to express a favourable or unfavourable opinion of the distinguished person of whom these volumes treat; so that each reader may judge of their validity for himself.

The name, by an original error of the press, which proceeded too far before it was discovered, has been printed with a *u*, – Buonaparte instead of Bonaparte. Both spellings were indifferently adopted in the family; but Napoleon always used the last,² and had an unquestionable right to choose the orthography which he preferred.

Edinburgh, 7th June, 1827.

² Barras, in his official account of the affair of the 13th Vendémiaire, (Oct. 5, 1795,) calls him General *Buonaparte*; and in the contract of marriage between Napoleon and Josephine, still existing in the registry of the second arrondissement of Paris, dated March 9, 1796, his signature is so written. No document has ever been produced, in which the word appears as *Bonaparte*, prior to Napoleon's appointment to the command of the Army of Italy.

ADVERTISEMENT TO EDITION 1834

Sir Walter Scott left two interleaved copies of his *Life of Napoleon*, in both of which his executors have found various corrections of the text, and additional notes. They were directed by his testament to take care, that, in case a new edition of the work were called for, the annotations of it might be completed in the fashion here adopted, dates and other marginal elucidations regularly introduced, and the text itself, wherever there appeared any redundancy of statement, abridged. With these instructions, except the last, the Editor has now endeavoured to comply.³

"Walter Scott," says Goëthe, "passed his childhood among the stirring scenes of the American War, and was a youth of seventeen or eighteen when the French Revolution broke out. Now well advanced in the fifties, having all along been favourably placed for observation, he proposes to lay before us his views and recollections of the important events through which he has lived. The richest, the easiest, the most celebrated narrator of the century, undertakes to write the history of his own time.

"What expectations the announcement of such a work must have excited in me, will be understood by any one who

³ [Sir Walter Scott's Notes have the letter S affixed to them, all of the others having been collected by the Editor of the 1843 Edition.]

remembers that I, twenty years older than Scott, conversed with Paoli in the twentieth year of my age, and with Napoleon himself in the sixtieth.

"Through that long series of years, coming more or less into contact with the great doings of the world, I failed not to think seriously on what was passing around me, and, after my own fashion, to connect so many extraordinary mutations into something like arrangement and interdependence.

"What could now be more delightful to me than leisurely and calmly to sit down and listen to the discourse of such a man, while clearly, truly, and with all the skill of a great artist, he recalls to me the incidents on which through life I have meditated, and the influence of which is still daily in operation?" – Goëthe's *Posthumous Works*, vol. vi., p. 253.

Sed non in Cæsare tantum
Nomen erat, nec fama ducis; sed nescia virtus
Stare loco: solusque pudor non vincere bello.
Acer et indomitus; quo spes quoque ira vocasset,
Ferre manum, et nunquam temerando parcere ferro:
Successus urgere suos: instare favori
Numinis: impellens quicquid sibi summa petenti
Obstaret: gaudensque viam fecisse ruina.

*Lucani, Pharsalia, Lib. I.*⁴

⁴ "But Cæsar's greatness, and his strength, was more Than past renown and antiquated power; 'Twas not the fame of what he once had been, Or tales in old records and annals

seen;But 'twas a valour restless, unconfined,Which no success could sate, nor limits
bind;'Twas shame, a soldier's shame, untaught to yield,That blush'd for nothing but
an ill-fought field;Fierce in his hopes he was, nor knew to stayWhere vengeance or
ambition led the way;Still prodigal of war whene'er withstood,Nor spared to stain the
guilty sword with blood;Urging advantage, he improved all odds,And made the most
of fortune and the gods;Pleased to o'erturn whate'er withheld his prize,And saw the
ruin with rejoicing eyes." – Rowe.

CHAPTER I

VIEW OF THE FRENCH REVOLUTION

Review of the state of Europe after the Peace of Versailles – England – France – Spain – Prussia – Imprudent Innovations of the Emperor Joseph – Disturbances in his Dominions – Russia – France – Her ancient System of Monarchy – how organized – Causes of its Decay – Decay of the Nobility as a body – The new Nobles – The Country Nobles – The Nobles of the highest Order – The Church – The higher Orders of the Clergy – The lower Orders – The Commons – Their increase in Power and Importance – Their Claims opposed to those of the Privileged Classes.

When we look back on past events, however important, it is difficult to recall the precise sensations with which we viewed them in their progress, and to recollect the fears, hopes, doubts, and difficulties, for which Time and the course of Fortune have formed a termination, so different probably from that which we had anticipated. When the rush of the inundation was before our eyes, and in our ears, we were scarce able to remember the state of things before its rage commenced, and when, subsequently, the deluge has subsided within the natural limits of the stream,

it is still more difficult to recollect with precision the terrors it inspired when at its height. That which is present possesses such power over our senses and our imagination, that it requires no common effort to recall those sensations which expired with preceding events. Yet, to do this is the peculiar province of history, which will be written and read in vain, unless it can connect with its details an accurate idea of the impression which these produced on men's minds while they were yet in their transit. It is with this view that we attempt to resume the history of France and of Europe, at the conclusion of the American war – a period now only remembered by the more advanced part of the present generation.

STATE OF EUROPE.

The peace concluded at Versailles in 1783, was reasonably supposed to augur a long repose to Europe. The high and emulous tone assumed in former times by the rival nations, had been lowered and tamed by recent circumstances. England, under the guidance of a weak, at least a most unlucky administration,⁵ had purchased peace at the expense of her North American Empire, and the resignation of supremacy over her colonies; a loss great in itself, but exaggerated in the eyes of the nation, by the rending asunder of the ties of common descent, and exclusive commercial intercourse, and by a sense of the wars waged, and expenses encountered for the protection and advancement of the

⁵ In consequence of the censure passed on the Peace by the House of Commons, the Shelburne ministry was dissolved on the 26th of February, 1783.

fair empire which England found herself obliged to surrender. The lustre of the British arms, so brilliant at the Peace of Fontainebleau, had been tarnished, if not extinguished. In spite of the gallant defence of Gibraltar, the general result of the war on land had been unfavourable to her military reputation; and notwithstanding the opportune and splendid victories of Rodney, the coasts of Britain had been insulted, and her fleets compelled to retire into port, while those of her combined enemies rode masters of the channel.⁶ The spirit of the country also had been lowered, by the unequal contest which had been sustained, and by the sense that her naval superiority was an object of invidious hatred to united Europe. This had been lately made manifest, by the armed alliance of the northern nations, which, though termed a neutrality, was, in fact, a league made to abate the pretensions of England to maritime supremacy. There are to be added to these disheartening and depressing circumstances, the decay of commerce during the long course of hostilities, with the want of credit and depression of the price of land, which are the usual consequences of a transition from war to peace, ere capital has regained its natural channel. All these things being considered, it appeared the manifest interest of England to husband her exhausted resources, and recruit her

⁶ "During nearly twenty years, ever since the termination of the war with France in 1763, the British flag had scarcely been any where triumphant; while the navies of the House of Bourbon, throughout the progress of the American contest, annually insulted us in the Channel, intercepted our mercantile convoys, blocked our harbours, and threatened our coasts." – Wraxall, 1782.

diminished wealth, by cultivating peace and tranquillity for a long course of time. William Pitt, never more distinguished than in his financial operations, was engaged in new modelling the revenue of the country, and adding to the return of the taxes, while he diminished their pressure. It could scarcely be supposed that any object of national ambition would have been permitted to disturb him in a task so necessary.

Neither had France, the natural rival of England, come off from the contest in such circumstances of triumph and advantage, as were likely to encourage her to a speedy renewal of the struggle. It is true, she had seen and contributed to the humiliation of her ancient enemy, but she had paid dearly for the gratification of her revenge, as nations and individuals are wont to do. Her finances, tampered with by successive sets of ministers, who looked no farther than to temporary expedients for carrying on the necessary expenses of government, now presented an alarming prospect; and it seemed as if the wildest and most enterprising ministers would hardly have dared, in their most sanguine moments, to have recommended either war itself, or any measures of which war might be the consequence.

Spain was in a like state of exhaustion. She had been hurried into the alliance against England, partly by the consequences of the family alliance betwixt her Bourbons and those of France, but still more by the eager and engrossing desire to possess herself once more of Gibraltar. The Castilian pride, long galled by beholding this important fortress in the hands of heretics and

foreigners, highly applauded the war, which gave a chance of its recovery, and seconded, with all the power of the kingdom, the gigantic efforts made for that purpose. All these immense preparations, with the most formidable means of attack ever used on such an occasion, had totally failed, and the kingdom of Spain remained at once stunned and mortified by the failure, and broken down by the expenses of so huge an undertaking. An attack upon Algiers, in 1784-5, tended to exhaust the remains of her military ardour. Spain, therefore, relapsed into inactivity and repose, dispirited by the miscarriage of her favourite scheme, and possessing neither the means nor the audacity necessary to meditate its speedy renewal.

Neither were the sovereigns of the late belligerent powers of that ambitious and active character which was likely to drag the kingdoms which they swayed into the renewal of hostilities. The classic eye of the historian Gibbon saw Arcadius and Honorius, the weakest and most indolent of the Roman Emperors, slumbering upon the thrones of the House of Bourbon;⁷ and the

⁷ "The deepest wounds were inflicted on the empire during the minorities of the sons and grandsons of Theodosius; and after those incapable princes seemed to attain the age of manhood, they abandoned the church to the bishops, the state to the eunuchs, and the provinces to the barbarians. Europe is now divided into twelve powerful, though unequal kingdoms, three respectable commonwealths, and a variety of smaller, though independent states: the chances of royal and ministerial talents are multiplied, at least with the number of its rulers; and a Julian, or Semiramis, may reign in the north, while Arcadius and Honorius again slumber on the thrones of the south." – Gibbon's *Decline and Fall*, vol. iii., p. 636. "It may not be generally known that Louis the Sixteenth is a great reader, and a great reader of English books. On perusing a

just and loyal character of George III. precluded any effort on his part to undermine the peace which he signed unwillingly, or to attempt the resumption of those rights which he had formally, though reluctantly, surrendered. His expression to the ambassador of the United States,⁸ was a trait of character never to be omitted or forgotten: – "I have been the last man in my dominions to accede to this peace, which separates America from my kingdoms – I will be the first man, now it is made, to resist any attempt to infringe it."

The acute historian whom we have already quoted seems to have apprehended, in the character and ambition of the northern potentates, those causes of disturbance which were not to be found in the western part of the European republic. But Catherine, the Semiramis of the north, had her views of extensive dominion chiefly turned towards her eastern and southern frontier, and the finances of her immense, but comparatively poor and unpeopled empire, were burdened with the expenses of a luxurious court, requiring at once to be gratified with the splendour of Asia and the refinements of Europe. The strength of her empire also, though immense, was unwieldy, and the empire

passage in my History, which seems to compare him to Arcadius or Honorius, he expressed his resentment to the Prince of B*****, from whom the intelligence was conveyed to me. I shall neither disclaim the allusion, nor examine the likeness; but the situation of the late King of France excludes all suspicion of flattery; and I am ready to declare, that the concluding observations of my third volume were written before his accession to the throne." – Gibbon's *Memoirs*, vol. i., p. 126.

⁸ On the occasion of the first audience of Mr. Adams, in June, 1785. – See *Wraxall's Own Time*, vol. i., p. 381.

had not been uniformly fortunate in its wars with the more prompt, though less numerous armies of the King of Prussia, her neighbour. Thus Russia, no less than other powers in Europe, appeared more desirous of reposing her gigantic strength, than of adventuring upon new and hazardous conquests. Even her views upon Turkey, which circumstances seemed to render more flattering than ever, she was contented to resign, in 1784, when only half accomplished; a pledge, not only that her thoughts were sincerely bent upon peace, but that she felt the necessity of resisting even the most tempting opportunities for resuming the course of victory which she had, four years before, pursued so successfully.

GERMANY.

Frederick of Prussia himself, who had been so long, by dint of genius and talent, the animating soul of the political intrigues in Europe, had run too many risks, in the course of his adventurous and eventful reign, to be desirous of encountering new hazards in the extremity of life. His empire, extended as it was from the shores of the Baltic to the frontiers of Holland, consisted of various detached portions, which it required the aid of time to consolidate into a single kingdom. And, accustomed to study the signs of the times, it could not have escaped Frederick, that sentiments and feelings were afloat, connected with, and fostered by, the spirit of unlimited investigation, which he himself had termed philosophy, such as might soon call upon the sovereigns to arm in a common cause, and ought to prevent them, in the

meanwhile, from wasting their strength in mutual struggles, and giving advantage to a common enemy.

If such anticipations occupied and agitated the last years of Frederick's life, they had not the same effect upon the Emperor Joseph II., who, without the same clear-eyed precision of judgment, endeavoured to tread in the steps of the King of Prussia, as a reformer, and as a conqueror. It would be unjust to deny to this prince the praise of considerable talents, and inclination to employ them for the good of the country which he ruled. But it frequently happens, that the talents, and even the virtues of sovereigns, exercised without respect to time and circumstances, become the misfortune of their government. It is particularly the lot of princes, endowed with such personal advantages, to be confident in their own abilities, and, unless educated in the severe school of adversity, to prefer favourites, who assent to and repeat their opinions, to independent counsellors, whose experience might correct their own hasty conclusions. And thus, although the personal merits of Joseph II. were in every respect acknowledged, his talents in a great measure recognised, and his patriotic intentions scarcely disputable, it fell to his lot, during the period we treat of, to excite more apprehension and discontent among his subjects, than if he had been a prince content to rule by a minister, and wear out an indolent life in the forms and pleasures of a court. Accordingly, the Emperor, in many of his schemes of reform, too hastily adopted, or at least too incautiously and peremptorily

executed, had the misfortune to introduce fearful commotions among the people, whose situation he meant to ameliorate, while in his external relations he rendered Austria the quarter from which a breach of European peace was most to be apprehended. It seemed, indeed, as if the Emperor had contrived to reconcile his philosophical professions with the exercise of the most selfish policy towards the United Provinces, both in opening the Scheldt, and in dismantling the barrier towns, which had been placed in their hands as a defence against the power of France. By the first of these measures the Emperor gained nothing but the paltry sum of money for which he sold his pretensions,⁹ and the shame of having shown himself ungrateful for the important services which the United Provinces had rendered to his ancestors. But the dismantling of the Dutch barrier was subsequently attended by circumstances alike calamitous to Austria, and to the whole continent of Europe.

In another respect, the reforms carried through by Joseph II. tended to prepare the public mind for future innovations, made with a ruder hand, and upon a much larger scale.¹⁰ The suppression of the religious orders, and the appropriation of

⁹ "The sum, after long debates, was fixed by the Emperor at ten million guilders." – Coxe's *House of Austria*, vol. ii., p. 583.

¹⁰ "Joseph the Second borrowed the language of philosophy, when he wished to suppress the monks of Belgium, and to seize their revenues: but there was seen on him a mask only of philosophy, covering the hideous countenance of a greedy despot: and the people ran to arms. Nothing better than another kind of despotism has been seen in the revolutionary powers." – Brissot, *Letter to his Constituents*, 1794.

their revenues to the general purposes of government, had in it something to flatter the feelings of those of the Reformed religion; but, in a moral point of view, the seizing upon the property of any private individual, or public body, is an invasion of the most sacred principles of public justice, and such spoliation cannot be vindicated by urgent circumstances of state-necessity, or any plausible pretext of state-advantage whatsoever, since no necessity can vindicate what is in itself unjust, and no public advantage can compensate a breach of public faith.¹¹ Joseph was also the first Catholic sovereign who broke through the solemn degree of reverence attached by that religion to the person of the Sovereign Pontiff. The Pope's fruitless and humiliating visit to Vienna furnished the shadow of a precedent for the conduct of Napoleon to Pius VII.¹²

¹¹ "In 1780, there were 2024 convents in the Austrian dominions: These were diminished to 700, and 36,000 monks and nuns to 2700. Joseph might have applied to his own reforms the remark he afterwards made to General D'Alten, on the reforms of the French: – 'The new constitution of France has not been very polite to the high clergy and nobility; and I still doubt much if all these fine things can be carried into execution!'" – Coxe, vol. ii., p. 578.

¹² "The Pope reached Vienna in February, 1782. He was received with every mark of exterior homage and veneration; but his exhortations and remonstrances were treated with coldness and reserve, and he was so narrowly watched, that the back-door of his apartments was blocked up to prevent him from receiving private visitors. Chagrined with the inflexibility of the Emperor, and mortified by an unmeaning ceremonial, and an affected display of veneration for the Holy See, while it was robbed of its richest possessions, and its most valuable privileges, Pius quitted Vienna at the expiration of a month, equally disgusted and humiliated, after having exhibited himself as a disappointed suppliant at the foot of that throne which had been so often shaken by

Another and yet less justifiable cause of innovation, placed in peril, and left in doubt and discontent, some of the fairest provinces of the Austrian dominions, and those which the wisest of their princes had governed with peculiar tenderness and moderation. The Austrian Netherlands had been in a literal sense dismantled and left open to the first invader, by the demolition of the barrier fortresses; and it seems to have been the systematic purpose of the Emperor to eradicate and destroy that love and regard for their prince and his government, which in time of need proves the most effectual moral substitute for moats and ramparts. The history of the house of Burgundy bore witness on every page to the love of the Flemings for liberty, and the jealousy with which they have, from the earliest ages, watched the privileges they had obtained from their princes. Yet in that country, and amongst these people, Joseph carried on his measures of innovation with a hand so unsparing, as if he meant to bring the question of liberty or arbitrary power to a very brief and military decision betwixt him and his subjects.

FLEMISH DISTURBANCES.

His alterations were not in Flanders, as elsewhere, confined to the ecclesiastical state alone, although such innovations were peculiarly offensive to a people rigidly Catholic, but were extended through the most important parts of the civil government. Changes in the courts of justice were threatened —

the great seal, which had hitherto remained with the chancellor of the States, was transferred to the Imperial minister – a Council of State, composed of commissioners nominated by the Emperor, was appointed to discharge the duties hitherto intrusted to a standing committee of the States of Brabant – their universities were altered and new-modelled – and their magistrates subjected to arbitrary arrests and sent to Vienna, instead of being tried in their own country and by their own laws. The Flemish people beheld these innovations with the sentiments natural to freemen, and not a little stimulated certainly by the scenes which had lately passed in North America, where, under circumstances of far less provocation, a large empire had emancipated itself from the mother country. The States remonstrated loudly, and refused submission to the decrees which encroached on their constitutional liberties, and at length arrayed a military force in support of their patriotic opposition.

Joseph, who at the same time he thus wantonly provoked the States and people of Flanders, had been seduced by Russia to join her ambitious plan upon Turkey, bent apparently before the storm he had excited, and for a time yielded to accommodation with his subjects of Flanders, renounced the most obnoxious of his new measures, and confirmed the privileges of the nation, at what was called the Joyous Entry.¹³ But this spirit of conciliation

¹³ The charter by which the privileges of the Flemings were settled, had been promulgated on the *entry* of Philip the Good into Brussels. Hence this name. – See Coxe.

was only assumed for the purpose of deception; for so soon as he had assembled in Flanders what was deemed a sufficient armed force to sustain his despotic purposes, the Emperor threw off the mask, and, by the most violent acts of military force, endeavoured to overthrow the constitution he had agreed to observe, and to enforce the arbitrary measures which he had pretended to abandon. For a brief period of two years, Flanders remained in a state of suppressed, but deeply-founded and wide-extended discontent, watching for a moment favourable to freedom and to vengeance. It proved an ample store-house of combustibles, prompt to catch fire, as the flame now arising in France began to expand itself; nor can it be doubted, that the condition of the Flemish provinces, whether considered in a military or in a political light, was one of the principal causes of the subsequent success of the French Republican arms. Joseph himself, broken-hearted and dispirited, died in the very beginning of the troubles he had wantonly provoked.¹⁴ Desirous of fame as a legislator and a warrior, and certainly born with talents to acquire it, he left his arms dishonoured by the successes of the despised Turks, and his fair dominions of the Netherlands and of Hungary upon the very eve of insurrection. A lampoon, written upon the hospital for lunatics at Vienna, might be said to be no unjust epitaph for a monarch, one so hopeful and so

¹⁴ "Joseph expired at Vienna, in February, 1790, at the age of forty-nine, extenuated by diseases, caused or accelerated in their progress by his own irritability of temper, agitation of mind, and the embarrassment of his affairs." – Wraxall, vol. i., p. 277.

beloved – "Josephus, ubique Secundus, hic Primus."

These Flemish disturbances might be regarded as symptoms of the new opinions which were tacitly gaining ground in Europe, and which preceded the grand explosion, as slight shocks of an earthquake usually announce the approach of its general convulsion. The like may be said of the short-lived Dutch revolution of 1787, in which the ancient faction of Louvestein, under the encouragement of France, for a time completely triumphed over that of the Stadtholder, deposed him from his hereditary command of Captain-General of the Army of the States, and reduced, or endeavoured to reduce, the confederation of the United States to a pure democracy. This was also a strong sign of the times; for, although totally opposite to the inclination of the majority of the States-General, of the equestrian body, of the landed proprietors, nay, of the very populace, most of whom were from habit and principle attached to the House of Orange, the burghers of the large towns drove on the work of revolution with such warmth of zeal and promptitude of action, as showed a great part of the middling classes to be deeply tinctured with the desire of gaining further liberty, and a larger share in the legislation and administration of the country, than pertained to them under the old oligarchical constitution.

The revolutionary government, in the Dutch provinces, did not, however, conduct their affairs with prudence. Without waiting to organize their own force, or weaken that of the enemy – without obtaining the necessary countenance and

protection of France, or co-operating with the malecontents in the Austrian Netherlands, they gave, by arresting the Princess of Orange, (sister of the King of Prussia,) an opportunity of foreign interference, of which that prince failed not to avail himself. His armies, commanded by the Duke of Brunswick, poured into the United Provinces, and with little difficulty possessed themselves of Utrecht, Amsterdam, and the other cities which constituted the strength of the Louvestein or republican faction. The King then replaced the House of Orange in all its power, privileges, and functions. The conduct of the Dutch republicans during their brief hour of authority had been neither so moderate nor so popular as to make their sudden and almost unresisting fall a matter of general regret. On the contrary, it was considered as a probable pledge of the continuance of peace in Europe, especially as France, busied with her own affairs, declined interference in those of the United States.

INTRIGUES OF RUSSIA.

The intrigues of Russia had, in accomplishment of the ambitious schemes of Catherine, lighted up war with Sweden, as well as with Turkey; but in both cases hostilities were commenced upon the old plan of fighting one or two battles, and wresting a fortress of a province from a neighbouring state; and it seems likely, that the intervention of France and England, equally interested in preserving the balance of power, might have ended these troubles, but for the progress of that great and hitherto unheard-of course of events, which prepared, carried on, and

matured, the French Revolution.

It is necessary, for the execution of our plan, that we should review this period of history, the most important, perhaps, during its currency, and in its consequences, which the annals of mankind afford; and although the very title is sufficient to awaken in most bosoms either horror or admiration, yet, neither insensible of the blessings of national liberty, nor of those which flow from the protection of just laws, and a moderate but firm executive government, we may perhaps be enabled to trace its events with the candour of one, who, looking back on past scenes, feels divested of the keen and angry spirit with which, in common with his contemporaries, he may have judged them while they were yet in progress.

We have shortly reviewed the state of Europe in general, which we have seen to be either pacific or disturbed by troubles of no long duration; but it was in France that a thousand circumstances, some arising out of the general history of the world, some peculiar to that country herself, mingled, like the ingredients in the witches' cauldron, to produce in succession many a formidable but passing apparition, until concluded by the stern Vision of absolute and military power, as those in the drama are introduced by that of the Armed Head.¹⁵

The first and most effective cause of the Revolution, was the change which had taken place in the feelings of the French towards their government, and the monarch who was its head.

¹⁵ See *Macbeth*, act iv., sc. i.

The devoted loyalty of the people to their king had been for several ages the most marked characteristic of the nation; it was their honour in their own eyes, and matter of contempt and ridicule in those of the English, because it seemed in its excess to swallow up all ideas of patriotism. That very excess of loyalty, however, was founded not on a servile, but upon a generous principle. France is ambitious, fond of military glory, and willingly identifies herself with the fame acquired by her soldiers. Down to the reign of Louis XV., the French monarch was, in the eyes of his subjects, a general, and the whole people an army. An army must be under severe discipline, and a general must possess absolute power; but the soldier feels no degradation from the restraint which is necessary to his profession, and without which he cannot be led to conquest.

FRENCH MONARCHY.

Every true Frenchman, therefore, submitted, without scruple to that abridgement of personal liberty which appeared necessary to render the monarch great, and France victorious. The King, according to this system, was regarded less as an individual than as the representative of the concentrated honour of the kingdom; and in this sentiment, however extravagant and Quixotic, there mingled much that was generous, patriotic, and disinterested. The same feeling was awakened after all the changes of the Revolution, by the wonderful successes of the Individual of whom the future volumes are to treat, and who transferred, in many instances to his own person, by deeds almost exceeding

credibility, the species of devoted attachment with which France formerly regarded the ancient line of her kings.

The nobility shared with the king in the advantages which this predilection spread around him. If the monarch was regarded as the chief ornament of the community, they were the minor gems by whose lustre that of the crown was relieved or adorned. If he was the supreme general of the state, they were the officers attached to his person, and necessary to the execution of his commands, each in his degree bound to advance the honour and glory of the common country. When such sentiments were at their height, there could be no murmuring against the peculiar privileges of the nobility, any more than against the almost absolute authority of the monarch. Each had that rank in the state which was regarded as his birth-right, and for one of the lower orders to repine that he enjoyed not the immunities peculiar to the noblesse, would have been as unavailing, and as foolish, as to lament that he was not born to an independent estate. Thus, the Frenchman, contented, though with an illusion, laughed, danced, and indulged all the gaiety of his national character, in circumstances under which his insular neighbours would have thought the slightest token of patience dishonourable and degrading. The distress or privation which the French plebeian suffered in his own person, was made up to him in imagination by his interest in the national glory.

Was a citizen of Paris postponed in rank to the lowest military officer, he consoled himself by reading the victories of the

French arms in the Gazette; and was he unduly and unequally taxed to support the expense of the crown, still the public feasts which were given, and the palaces which were built, were to him a source of compensation. He looked on at the Carousal, he admired the splendour of Versailles, and enjoyed a reflected share of their splendour, in recollecting that they displayed the magnificence of his country. This state of things, however illusory, seemed, while the illusion lasted, to realize the wish of those legislators, who have endeavoured to form a general fund of national happiness, from which each individual is to draw his personal share of enjoyment. If the monarch enjoyed the display of his own grace and agility, while he hunted, or rode at the ring, the spectators had their share of pleasure in witnessing it: if Louis had the satisfaction of beholding the splendid piles of Versailles and the Louvre arise at his command, the subject admired them when raised, and his real portion of pleasure was not, perhaps, inferior to that of the founder. The people were like men inconveniently placed in a crowded theatre, who think little of the personal inconveniences they are subjected to by the heat and pressure, while their mind is engrossed by the splendours of the representation. In short, not only the political opinions of Frenchmen but their actual feelings, were, in the earlier days of the eighteenth century, expressed in the motto which they chose for their national palace – "Earth hath no nation like the French – no Nation a City like Paris, or a King like Louis."

The French enjoyed this assumed superiority with the less

chance of being undeceived, that they listened not to any voice from other lands, which pointed out the deficiencies in the frame of government under which they lived, or which hinted the superior privileges enjoyed by the subjects of a more free state. The intense love of our own country, and admiration of its constitution, is usually accompanied with a contempt or dislike of foreign states, and their modes of government. The French, in the reign of Louis XIV., enamoured of their own institutions, regarded those of other nations as unworthy of their consideration; and if they paused for a moment to gaze on the complicated constitution of their great rival, it was soon dismissed as a subject totally unintelligible, with some expression of pity, perhaps, for the poor sovereign who had the ill luck to preside over a government embarrassed by so many restraints and limitations.¹⁶ Yet, into whatever political errors the French people were led by the excess of their loyalty, it would be unjust to brand them as a nation of a mean and slavish spirit. Servitude infers dishonour, and dishonour to a Frenchman is the last of evils. Burke more justly regarded them as a people misled to their disadvantage, by high and romantic ideas of honour and fidelity, and who, actuated by a principle of public spirit in their submission to their monarch, worshipped, in his person, the Fortune of France their common country.

During the reign of Louis XIV., every thing tended to support the sentiment which connected the national honour with the

¹⁶ The old French proverb bore, — "Le roi d'Angleterre, Est le roi d'Enfer." — S.

wars and undertakings of the king. His success, in the earlier years of his reign, was splendid, and he might be regarded for many years, as the dictator of Europe. During this period, the universal opinion of his talents, together with his successes abroad, and his magnificence at home, fostered the idea that the Grand Monarque was in himself the tutelar deity, and only representative, of the great nation whose powers he wielded. Sorrow and desolation came on his latter years; but be it said to the honour of the French people, that the devoted allegiance they had paid to Louis in prosperity, was not withdrawn when fortune seemed to have turned her back upon her original favourite. France poured her youth forth as readily, if not so gaily, to repair the defeats of her monarch's old age, as she had previously yielded them to secure and extend the victories of his early reign. Louis had perfectly succeeded in establishing the crown as the sole pivot upon which public affairs turned, and in attaching to his person, as the representative of France, all the importance which in other countries is given to the great body of the nation.

Nor had the spirit of the French monarchy, in surrounding itself with all the dignity of absolute power, failed to secure the support of those auxiliaries which have the most extended influence upon the public mind, by engaging at once religion and literature in defence of its authority. The Gallican Church, more dependent upon the monarch, and less so upon the Pope, than is usual in Catholic countries, gave to the power of the crown all the mysterious and supernatural terrors annexed to an origin in divine

right, and directed against those who encroached on the limits of the royal prerogative, or even ventured to scrutinize too minutely the foundation of its authority, the penalties annexed to a breach of the divine law. Louis XIV. repaid this important service by a constant, and even scrupulous attention to observances prescribed by the Church, which strengthened, in the eyes of the public, the alliance so strictly formed betwixt the altar and the throne. Those who look to the private morals of the monarch may indeed form some doubt of the sincerity of his religious professions, considering how little they influenced his practice; and yet, when we reflect upon the frequent inconsistencies of mankind in this particular, we may hesitate to charge with hypocrisy a conduct, which was dictated perhaps as much by conscience as by political convenience. Even judging more severely, it must be allowed that hypocrisy, though so different from religion, indicates its existence, as smoke points out that of pure fire. Hypocrisy cannot exist unless religion be to a certain extent held in esteem, because no one would be at the trouble to assume a mask which was not respectable, and so far compliance with the external forms of religion is a tribute paid to the doctrines which it teaches. The hypocrite assumes a virtue if he has it not, and the example of his conduct may be salutary to others, though his pretensions to piety are wickedness to Him, who trieth the heart and reins.

On the other hand, the Academy formed by the wily Richelieu served to unite the literature of France into one focus, under

the immediate patronage of the crown, to whose bounty its professors were taught to look even for the very means of subsistence. The greater nobles caught this ardour of patronage from the sovereign, and as the latter pensioned and supported the principal literary characters of his reign, the former granted shelter and support to others of the same rank, who were lodged at their hotels, fed at their tables, and were admitted to their society upon terms somewhat less degrading than those which were granted to artists and musicians, and who gave to the Great, knowledge or amusement in exchange for the hospitality they received. Men in a situation so subordinate, could only at first accommodate their compositions to the taste and interest of their protectors. They heightened by adulation and flattery the claims of the king and the nobles upon the community; and the nation, indifferent at that time to all literature which was not of native growth, felt their respect for their own government enhanced and extended by the works of those men of genius who flourished under its protection.

Such was the system of French monarchy, and such it remained, in outward show at least, until the peace of Fontainbleau. But its foundation had been gradually undermined; public opinion had undergone a silent but almost a total change, and it might be compared to some ancient tower swayed from its base by the lapse of time, and waiting the first blast of a hurricane, or shock of an earthquake, to be prostrated in the dust. How the lapse of half a century, or little more, could have

produced a change so total, must next be considered; and this can only be done by viewing separately the various changes which the lapse of years had produced on the various orders of the state.

DECAY OF THE NOBILITY.

First, then, it is to be observed, that in these latter times the wasting effects of luxury and vanity had totally ruined the greater part of the French nobility, a word which, in respect of that country, comprehended what is called in Britain the nobility and gentry, or natural aristocracy of the kingdom. This body, during the reign of Louis XIV., though far even then from supporting the part which their fathers had acted in history, yet existed, as it were, through their remembrances, and disguised their dependence upon the throne by the outward show of fortune, as well as by the consequence attached to hereditary right. They were one step nearer the days, not then totally forgotten, when the nobles of France, with their retainers, actually formed the army of the kingdom; and they still presented, to the imagination at least, the descendants of a body of chivalrous heroes, ready to tread in the path of their ancestors, should the times ever render necessary the calling forth the Ban, or Arrière-Ban – the feudal array of the Gallic chivalry. But this delusion had passed away; the defence of states was intrusted in France, as in other countries, to the exertions of a standing army; and, in the latter part of the eighteenth century, the nobles of France presented a melancholy contrast to their predecessors.

The number of the order was of itself sufficient to diminish

its consequence. It had been imprudently increased by new creations. There were in the kingdom about eighty thousand families enjoying the privileges of nobility; and the order was divided into different classes, which looked on each other with mutual jealousy and contempt.

The first general distinction was betwixt the Ancient, and Modern, or new noblesse. The former were nobles of old creation, whose ancestors had obtained their rank from real or supposed services rendered to the nation in her councils or her battles. The new nobles had found an easier access to the same elevation, by the purchase of territories, or of offices, or of letters of nobility, any of which easy modes invested the owners with titles and rank, often held by men whose wealth had been accumulated in mean and sordid occupations, or by farmers-general, and financiers, whom the people considered as acquiring their fortunes at the expense of the state. These numerous additions to the privileged body of nobles accorded ill with its original composition, and introduced schism and disunion into the body itself. The descendants of the ancient chivalry of France looked with scorn upon the new men, who, rising perhaps from the very lees of the people, claimed from superior wealth a share in the privileges of the aristocracy.

Again, secondly, there was, amongst the ancient nobles themselves, but too ample room for division between the upper and wealthier class of nobility, who had fortunes adequate to maintain their rank, and the much more numerous body, whose

poverty rendered them pensioners upon the state for the means of supporting their dignity. Of about one thousand houses, of which the ancient noblesse is computed to have consisted, there were not above two or three hundred families who had retained the means of maintaining their rank without the assistance of the crown. Their claims to monopolize commissions in the army, and situations in the government, together with their exemption from taxes, were their sole resources; resources burdensome to the state, and odious to the people, without being in the same degree beneficial to those who enjoyed them. Even in military service, which was considered as their birth-right, the nobility of the second class were seldom permitted to rise above a certain limited rank. Long service might exalt one of them to the *grade* of lieutenant-colonel, or the government of some small town, but all the better rewards of a life spent in the army were reserved for nobles of the highest order. It followed as a matter of course, that amidst so many of this privileged body who languished in poverty, and could not rise from it by the ordinary paths of industry, some must have had recourse to loose and dishonourable practices; and that gambling-houses and places of debauchery should have been frequented and patronised by individuals, whose ancient descent, titles, and emblems of nobility, did not save them from the suspicion of very dishonourable conduct, the disgrace of which affected the character of the whole body.

There must be noticed a third classification of the order,

into the Haute Noblesse, or men of the highest rank, most of whom spent their lives at court, and in discharge of the great offices of the crown and state, and the Noblesse Campagnarde, who continued to reside upon their patrimonial estates in the provinces.

The noblesse of the latter class had fallen gradually into a state of general contempt, which was deeply to be regretted. They were ridiculed and scorned by the courtiers, who despised the rusticity of their manners, and by the nobles of newer creation, who, conscious of their own wealth, contemned the poverty of these ancient but decayed families. The "bold peasant" himself not more a kingdom's pride than is the plain country gentleman, who, living on his own means, and amongst his own people, becomes the natural protector and referee of the farmer and the peasant, and, in case of need, either the firmest assertor of their rights and his own against the aggressions of the crown, or the independent and undaunted defender of the crown's rights, against the innovations of political fanaticism. In La Vendée alone, the nobles had united their interest and their fortune with those of the peasants who cultivated their estates, and there alone were they found in their proper and honourable character of proprietors residing on their own domains, and discharging the duties which are inalienably attached to the owner of landed property. And – mark-worthy circumstance! – in La Vendée alone was any stand made in behalf of the ancient proprietors, constitution, or religion of France; for there alone

the nobles and the cultivators of the soil held towards each other their natural and proper relations of patron and client, faithful dependents, and generous and affectionate superiors.¹⁷ In the other provinces of France, the nobility, speaking generally, possessed neither power nor influence among the peasantry, while the population around them was guided and influenced by men belonging to the Church, to the law, or to business; classes which were in general better educated, better informed, and possessed of more talent and knowledge of the world than the poor Noblesse Campagnarde, who seemed as much limited, caged, and imprisoned, within the restraints of their rank, as if they had been shut up within the dungeons of their ruinous chateaux; and who had only their titles and dusty parchments to oppose to the real superiority of wealth and information so generally to be found in the class which they affected to despise. Hence, Ségur describes the country gentlemen of his younger days as punctilious, ignorant, and quarrelsome, shunned by the better-informed of the middle classes, idle and dissipated, and wasting their leisure hours in coffee-houses, theatres, and billiard-rooms.¹⁸

The more wealthy families, and the high noblesse, as they were called, saw this degradation of the inferior part of their order without pity, or rather with pleasure. These last had risen as much above their natural duties, as the rural nobility had sunk beneath

¹⁷ See the Memoirs of the Marchioness De La Rochejaquelein, p. 48.

¹⁸ Ségur's Memoirs, vol. i., p. 76.

them. They had too well followed the course which Richelieu had contrived to recommend to their fathers, and instead of acting as the natural chiefs and leaders of the nobility and gentry of the provinces, they were continually engaged in intriguing for charges round the king's person, for posts in the administration, for additional titles and decorations – for all and every thing which could make the successful courtier, and distinguish him from the independent noble. Their education and habits also were totally unfavourable to grave or serious thought and exertion. If the trumpet had sounded, it would have found a ready echo in their bosoms; but light literature at best, and much more frequently silly and frivolous amusements, a constant pursuit of pleasure, and a perpetual succession of intrigues, either of love or petty politics, made their character, in time of peace, approach in insignificance to that of the women of the court, whom it was the business of their lives to captivate and amuse.¹⁹ There were noble exceptions, but in general the order, in every thing but military courage, had assumed a trivial and effeminate character, from which patriotic sacrifices, or masculine wisdom, were scarcely to be expected.

While the first nobles of France were engaged in these frivolous pursuits, their procureurs, bailiffs, stewards, intendants, or by whatever name their agents and managers were designated,

¹⁹ For a curious picture of the life of the French nobles of fifty years since, see the first volume of Madame Genlis's *Memoirs*. Had there been any more solid pursuits in society than the gay trifles she so pleasantly describes, they could not have escaped so intelligent an observer. – S.

enjoyed the real influence which their constituents rejected as beneath them, rose into a degree of authority and credit, which eclipsed recollection of the distant and regardless proprietor, and formed a rank in the state not very different from that of the middle-men in Ireland. These agents were necessarily of plebeian birth, and their profession required that they should be familiar with the details of public business, which they administered in the name of their seigneurs. Many of this condition gained power and wealth in the course of the Revolution, thus succeeding, like an able and intelligent vizier, to the power which was forfeited by the idle and voluptuous sultan. Of the high noblesse it might with truth be said, that they still formed the grace of the court of France, though they had ceased to be its defence. They were accomplished, brave, full of honour, and in many instances endowed with talent. But the communication was broken off betwixt them and the subordinate orders, over whom, in just degree, they ought to have possessed a natural influence. The chain of gradual and insensible connexion was rusted by time, in almost all its dependencies; forcibly distorted, and contemptuously wrenched asunder, in many. The noble had neglected and flung from him the most precious jewel in his coronet – the love and respect of the country-gentleman, the farmer, and the peasant, an advantage so natural to his condition in a well-constituted society, and founded upon principles so estimable, that he who contemns or destroys it, is guilty of little less than high treason, both to his own rank, and to the

community in general. Such a change, however, had taken place in France, so that the noblesse might be compared to a sword, the hilt carved, ornamented, and gilded, such as might grace a day of parade, but the blade gone, or composed of the most worthless materials.

It only remains to be mentioned, that there subsisted, besides all the distinctions we have noticed, an essential difference in political opinions among the noblesse themselves, considered as a body. There were many of the order, who, looking to the exigencies of the kingdom, were patriotically disposed to sacrifice their own exclusive privileges, in order to afford a chance of its regeneration. These of course were disposed to favour an alteration or reform in the original constitution of France; but besides these enlightened individuals, the nobility had the misfortune to include many disappointed and desperate men, ungratified by any of the advantages which their rank made them capable of receiving, and whose advantages of birth and education only rendered them more deeply dangerous, or more daringly profligate. A plebeian, dishonoured by his vices, or depressed by the poverty which is their consequence, sinks easily into the insignificance from which wealth or character alone raised him; but the noble often retains the means, as well as the desire, to avenge himself on society, for an expulsion which he feels not the less because he is conscious of deserving it. Such were the debauched Roman youth, among whom were found Cataline, and associates equal in talents and in depravity to

their leader; and such was the celebrated Mirabeau, who, almost expelled from his own class, as an irreclaimable profligate, entered the arena of the Revolution as a first-rate reformer, and a popular advocate of the lower orders.

The state of the Church, that second pillar of the throne, was scarce more solid than that of the nobility. Generally speaking, it might be said, that, for a long time, the higher orders of the clergy had ceased to take a vital concern in their profession, or to exercise its functions in a manner which interested the feelings and affections of men.

The Catholic Church had grown old, and unfortunately did not possess the means of renovating her doctrines, or improving her constitution, so as to keep pace with the enlargement of the human understanding. The lofty claims to infallibility which she had set up and maintained during the middle ages, claims which she could neither renounce nor modify, now threatened, in more enlightened times, like battlements too heavy for the foundation, to be the means of ruining the edifice they were designed to defend. *Vestigia nulla retrorsum*, continued to be the motto of the Church of Rome. She could explain nothing, soften nothing, renounce nothing, consistently with her assertion of impeccability. The whole trash which had been accumulated for ages of darkness and ignorance, whether consisting of extravagant pretensions, incredible assertions, absurd doctrines which confounded the understanding, or puerile ceremonies which revolted the taste, were alike incapable of being explained

away or abandoned. It would certainly have been – humanly speaking – advantageous, alike for the Church of Rome, and for Christianity in general, that the former had possessed the means of relinquishing her extravagant claims, modifying her more obnoxious doctrines, and retrenching her superstitious ceremonial, as increasing knowledge showed the injustice of the one, and the absurdity of the other. But this power she dared not assume; and hence, perhaps, the great schism which divides the Christian world, which might otherwise never have existed, or at least not in its present extended and embittered state. But, in all events, the Church of Rome, retaining the spiritual empire over so large and fair a portion of the Christian world, would not have been reduced to the alternative of either defending propositions, which, in the eyes of all enlightened men, are altogether untenable, or of beholding the most essential and vital doctrines of Christianity confounded with them, and the whole system exposed to the scorn of the infidel. The more enlightened and better informed part of the French nation had fallen very generally into the latter extreme.

Infidelity, in attacking the absurd claims and extravagant doctrines of the Church of Rome, had artfully availed herself of those abuses, as if they had been really a part of the Christian religion; and they whose credulity could not digest the grossest articles of the Papist creed, thought themselves entitled to conclude, in general, against religion itself, from the abuses engrafted upon it by ignorance and priestcraft. The same

circumstances which favoured the assault, tended to weaken the defence. Embarrassed by the necessity of defending the mass of human inventions with which their Church had obscured and deformed Christianity, the Catholic clergy were not the best advocates even in the best of causes; and though there were many brilliant exceptions, yet it must be owned that a great part of the higher orders of the priesthood gave themselves little trouble about maintaining the doctrines, or extending the influence of the Church, considering it only in the light of an asylum, where, under the condition of certain renunciations, they enjoyed, in indolent tranquillity, a state of ease and luxury. Those who thought on the subject more deeply, were contented quietly to repose the safety of the Church upon the restrictions on the press, which prevented the possibility of free discussion. The usual effect followed; and many who, if manly and open debate upon theological subjects had been allowed, would doubtless have been enabled to winnow the wheat from the chaff, were, in the state of darkness to which they were reduced, led to reject Christianity itself, along with the corruptions of the Romish Church, and to become absolute infidels instead of reformed Christians.

THE CLERGY – DUBOIS.

The long and violent dispute also betwixt the Jesuits and the Jansenists, had for many years tended to lessen the general consideration for the Church at large, and especially for the higher orders of the clergy. In that quarrel, much had taken place that was disgraceful. The mask of religion has been often used

to cover more savage and extensive persecutions, but at no time did the spirit of intrigue, of personal malice, of slander, and circumvention, appear more disgustingly from under the sacred disguise; and in the eyes of the thoughtless and the vulgar, the general cause of religion suffered in proportion.

The number of the clergy who were thus indifferent to doctrine or duty was greatly increased, since the promotion to the great benefices had ceased to be distributed with regard to the morals, piety, talents, and erudition of the candidates, but was bestowed among the younger branches of the noblesse, upon men who were at little pains to reconcile the looseness of their former habits and opinions with the sanctity of their new profession, and who, embracing the Church solely as a means of maintenance, were little calculated by their lives or learning to extend its consideration. Among other vile innovations of the celebrated regent, Duke of Orleans, he set the most barefaced example of such dishonourable preferment, and had increased in proportion the contempt entertained for the hierarchy, even in its highest dignities, – since how was it possible to respect the purple itself, after it had covered the shoulders of the infamous Dubois?²⁰

²⁰ "A person of mean extraction, remarkable only for his vices, had been employed in correcting the Regent's tasks, and, by a servile complacence for all his inclinations, had acquired an ascendancy over his pupil, which he abused, for the purpose of corrupting his morals, debasing his character, and ultimately rendering his administration an object of universal indignation. Soon after his patron's accession to power, Dubois was admitted into the council of state. He asked for the Archbishopric of Cambray.

It might have been expected, and it was doubtless in a great measure the case, that the respect paid to the characters and efficient utility of the curates, upon whom, generally speaking, the charge of souls actually devolved, might have made up for the want of consideration withheld from the higher orders of the Church. There can be no doubt that this respectable body of churchmen possessed great and deserved influence over their parishioners; but then they were themselves languishing under poverty and neglect, and, as human beings, cannot be supposed to have viewed with indifference their superiors enjoying wealth and ease, while in some cases they dishonoured the robe they wore, and in others disowned the doctrines they were appointed to teach. Alive to feelings so natural, and mingling with the middling classes, of which they formed a most respectable portion, they must necessarily have become embued with their principles and opinions, and a very obvious train of reasoning would extend the consequences to their own condition. If the state was encumbered rather than benefited by the privileges of the higher order, was not the Church in the same condition? And if secular rank was to be thrown open as a general object of ambition to the able and the worthy, ought not the dignities

Unaccustomed as he was to delicate scruples, the Regent was startled at the idea of encountering the scandal to which such a prostitution of honours must expose him. He, however, ultimately yielded. This man, one of the most profligate that ever existed, was actually married at the time he received Catholic orders, but he suborned the witnesses, and contrived to have the parish registers, which might have deposed against him, destroyed." – See Lacretelle, tom. i., p. 348.

of the Church to be rendered more accessible to those, who, in humility and truth, discharged the toilsome duties of its inferior offices, and who might therefore claim, in due degree of succession, to attain higher preferment? There can be no injustice in ascribing to this body sentiments, which might have been no less just regarding the Church than advantageous to themselves; and, accordingly, it was not long before this body of churchmen showed distinctly, that their political views were the same with those of the Third Estate, to which they solemnly united themselves, strengthening thereby greatly the first revolutionary movements. But their conduct, when they beheld the whole system of their religion aimed at, should acquit the French clergy of the charge of self-interest, since no body, considered as such, ever showed itself more willing to encounter persecution, and submit to privation for conscience' sake.

TIERS ETAT.

While the Noblesse and the Church, considered as branches of the state, were thus divided amongst themselves, and fallen into discredit with the nation at large; while they were envied for their ancient immunities without being any longer feared for their power; while they were ridiculed at once and hated for the assumption of a superiority which their personal qualities did not always vindicate, the lowest order, the Commons, or, as they were at that time termed, the Third Estate, had gradually acquired an extent and importance unknown to the feudal ages, in which originated the ancient division of the estates of the

kingdom. The Third Estate no longer, as in the days of Henry IV., consisted merely of the burghers and petty traders in the small towns of a feudal kingdom, bred up almost as the vassals of the nobles and clergy, by whose expenditure they acquired their living. Commerce and colonies had introduced wealth, from sources to which the nobles and the churchmen had no access. Not only a very great proportion of the disposable capital was in the hands of the Third Estate, who thus formed the bulk of the moneyed interest of France, but a large share of the landed property was also in their possession.

There was, moreover, the influence which many plebeians possessed, as creditors, over those needy nobles whom they had supplied with money, while another portion of the same class rose into wealth and consideration, at the expense of the more opulent patricians who were ruining themselves. Paris had increased to a tremendous extent, and her citizens had risen to a corresponding degree of consideration; and while they profited by the luxury and dissipation, both of the court and courtiers, had become rich in proportion as the government and privileged classes grew poor. Those citizens who were thus enriched, endeavoured, by bestowing on their families all the advantages of good education, to counterbalance their inferiority of birth, and to qualify their children to support their part in the scenes, to which their altered fortunes, and the prospects of the country, appeared to call them. In short, it is not too much to say, that the middling classes acquired the advantages of

wealth, consequence, and effective power, in a proportion more than equal to that in which the nobility had lost these attributes. Thus, the Third Estate seemed to increase in extent, number, and strength, like a waxing inundation, threatening with every increasing wave to overwhelm the ancient and decayed barriers of exclusions and immunities, behind which the privileged ranks still fortified themselves.

It was not in the nature of man, that the bold, the talented, the ambitious, of a rank which felt its own power and consequence, should be long contented to remain acquiescent in political regulations, which depressed them in the state of society beneath men to whom they felt themselves equal in all respects, excepting the factitious circumstances of birth, or of Church orders. It was no less impossible that they should long continue satisfied with the feudal dogmas, which exempted the noblesse from taxes, because they served the nation with their sword, and the clergy, because they propitiated Heaven in its favour with their prayers. The maxim, however true in the feudal ages when it originated, had become an extravagant legal fiction in the eighteenth century, when all the world knew that both the noble soldier and the priest were paid for the services they no longer rendered to the state, while the *roturier* had both valour and learning to fight his own battles and perform his own devotions; and when, in fact, it was their arms which combated, and their learning which enlightened the state, rather than those of the

privileged orders.²¹

Thus, a body, opulent and important, and carrying along with their claims the sympathy of the whole people, were arranged in formidable array against the privileges of the nobles and clergy, and bound to further the approaching changes by the strongest of human ties, emulation and self-interest.

The point was stated with unusual frankness by Emeri, a distinguished member of the National Assembly, and a man of honour and talent. In the course of a confidential communication with the celebrated Marquis de Bouillé, the latter had avowed his principles of royalty, and his detestation of the new constitution, to which he said he only rendered obedience, because the King had sworn to maintain it. "You are right, being yourself a nobleman," replied Emeri, with equal candour; "and had I been born noble, such would have been my principles; but I, a plebeian *Avocat*, must naturally desire a revolution, and cherish that constitution which has called me, and those of my rank, out of a state of degradation."²²

Considering the situation, therefore, of the three separate bodies, which, before the revolutionary impulse commenced, were the constituent parts of the kingdom of France, it was evident, that in case of a collision, the Nobles and Clergy might esteem themselves fortunate, if, divided as they were among themselves, they could maintain an effectual defence of the

²¹ Thiers, Histoire de la Rév. Franç., tom. i., p. 34.

²² Mémoires de Bouillé, p. 289.

whole, or a portion of their privileges, while the Third Estate, confident in their numbers and in their unanimity, were ready to assail and carry by storm the whole system, over the least breach which might be effected in the ancient constitution. Lally Tolendal gave a comprehensive view of the state of parties in these words: – "The commons desired to conquer, the nobles to preserve what they already possessed. The clergy stood inactive, resolved to join the victorious party. If there was a man in France who wished for concord and peace, it was the king."²³

²³ Plaidoyer pour Louis Seize, 1793.

CHAPTER II

State of France continued – State of Public Opinion – Men of Letters encouraged by the Great – Disadvantages attending this Patronage – Licentious tendency of the French Literature – Their Irreligious and Infidel Opinions – Free Opinions on Politics permitted to be expressed in an abstract and speculative, but not in a practical Form – Disadvantages arising from the Suppression of Free Discussion – Anglomania – Share of France in the American War – Disposition of the Troops who returned from America.

STATE OF PUBLIC OPINION.

We have viewed France as it stood in its grand political divisions previous to the Revolution, and we have seen that there existed strong motives for change, and that a great force was prepared to level institutions which were crumbling to pieces of themselves. It is now necessary to review the state of the popular mind, and consider upon what principles, and to what extent, the approaching changes were likely to operate, and at what point they might be expected to stop. Here, as with respect to the ranks of society, a tacit but almost total change had been operated in the feelings and sentiments of the public, principally occasioned, doubtless, by the great ascendancy acquired by literature – that tree of knowledge of good and evil, which, amidst the richest and

most wholesome fruits, bears others, fair in show, and sweet to the taste, but having the properties of the most deadly poison.

The French, the most ingenious people in Europe, and the most susceptible of those pleasures which arise from conversation and literary discussion, had early called in the assistance of men of genius to enhance their relish for society. The nobles, without renouncing their aristocratic superiority, – which, on the contrary, was rendered more striking by the contrast, – permitted literary talents to be a passport into their saloons. The wealthy financier, and opulent merchant, emulated the nobility in this as in other articles of taste and splendour; and their coteries, as well as those of the aristocracy, were open to men of letters, who were in many cases contented to enjoy luxury at the expense of independence. Assuredly this species of patronage, while it often flowed from the vanity or egotism of the patrons, was not much calculated to enhance the character of those who were protected. Professors of literature, thus mingling in the society of the noble and the wealthy upon sufferance, held a rank scarcely higher than that of musicians or actors, from amongst whom individuals have often, by their talents and character, become members of the best society, while the castes, to which such individuals belong, remain in general exposed to the most humiliating contempt. The lady of quality, who smiled on the man of letters, and the man of rank, who admitted him to his intimacy, still retained their consciousness that he was not like themselves, formed out of the "porcelain clay of the

earth;" and even while receiving their bounties, or participating in their pleasures, the favourite *savant* must often have been disturbed by the reflection, that he was only considered as a creature of sufferance, whom the caprice of fashion, or a sudden reaction of the ancient etiquette, might fling out of the society where he was at present tolerated. Under this disheartening, and even degrading inferiority, the man of letters might be tempted invidiously to compare the luxurious style of living at which he sat a permitted guest, with his own paltry hired apartment, and scanty and uncertain chance of support. And even those of a nobler mood, when they had conceded to their benefactors all the gratitude they could justly demand, must sometimes have regretted their own situation,

"Condemn'd as needy supplicants to wait,
While ladies interpose and slaves debate."²⁴

It followed, that many of the men of letters, thus protected, became enemies of the persons, as well as the rank of their patrons; as, for example, no one in the course of the Revolution expressed greater hatred to the nobility than Champfort,²⁵ the favourite and favoured secretary of the Prince of Condé. Occasions, too, must frequently have occurred, in which the protected person was almost inevitably forced upon comparing

²⁴ Johnson's *Vanity of Human Wishes*.

²⁵ See his *Maximes et Pensées*, &c. &c. He died by his own hand in 1794.

his own natural and acquired talents with those of his aristocratic patron, and the result could not be other than a dislike of the institutions which placed him so far behind persons whom, but for those prescribed limits, he must have passed in the career of honour and distinction.

Hence arose that frequent and close inquiry into the origin of ranks, that general system of impugning the existing regulations, and appealing to the original states of society in vindication of the original equality of mankind – hence those ingenious arguments, and eloquent tirades in favour of primitive and even savage independence, which the patricians of the day read and applauded with such a smile of mixed applause and pity, as they would have given to the reveries of a crazed poet, while the inferior ranks, participating the feelings under which they were written, caught the ardour of the eloquent authors, and rose from the perusal with minds prepared to act, whenever action should be necessary to realize a vision so flattering.

It might have been expected that those belonging to the privileged classes at least, would have caught the alarm, from hearing doctrines so fatal to their own interests avowed so boldly, and maintained with so much talent. It might have been thought that they would have started, when Raynal proclaimed to the nations of the earth that they could only be free and happy when they had overthrown every throne and every altar;²⁶ but no such

²⁶ Revolution of America, 1781, pp. 44, 58. When, however, Raynal beheld the abuse of liberty in the progress of the French Revolution, he attempted to retrieve his

alarm was taken. Men of rank considered liberal principles as the fashion of the day, and embraced them as the readiest mode of showing that they were above vulgar prejudices. In short, they adopted political opinions as they put on round hats and jockey-coats, merely because they were current in good society. They assumed the tone of philosophers as they would have done that of Arcadian shepherds at a masquerade, but without any more thoughts of sacrificing their own rank and immunities in the one case, than of actually driving their flocks a-field in the other. Count Ségur gives a most interesting account of the opinions of the young French nobles, in which he himself partook at this eventful period.

"Impeded in this light career by the antiquated pride of the old court, the irksome etiquette of the old order of things, the severity of the old clergy, the aversion of our parents to our new fashions and our costumes, which were favourable to the principles of equality, we felt disposed to adopt with enthusiasm the philosophical doctrines professed by literary men, remarkable for their boldness and their wit. Voltaire seduced our imagination; Rousseau touched our hearts; we felt a secret pleasure in seeing that their attacks were directed against

errors. In May, 1791, he addressed to the Constituent Assembly a most eloquent letter, in which he says, "I am, I own to you, deeply afflicted at the crimes which plunge this empire into mourning. It is true that I am to look back with horror at myself for being one of those who, by feeling a noble indignation against ambitious power, may have furnished arms to licentiousness." Raynal was deprived of all his property during the Revolution, and died in poverty in 1796.

an old fabric, which presented to us a Gothic and ridiculous appearance. We were thus pleased at this petty war, although it was undermining our own ranks and privileges, and the remains of our ancient power; but we felt not these attacks personally; we merely witnessed them. It was as yet but a war of words and paper, which did not appear to us to threaten the superiority of existence we enjoyed, consolidated as we thought it, by a possession of many centuries. * * * We were pleased with the courage of liberty, whatever language it assumed, and with the convenience of equality. There is a satisfaction in descending from a high rank, as long as the resumption of it is thought to be free and unobstructed; and regardless, therefore, of consequences, we enjoyed our patrician advantages, together with the sweets of a plebeian philosophy."²⁷

We anxiously desire not to be mistaken. It is not the purport of these remarks to blame the French aristocracy for extending their patronage to learning and to genius. The purpose was honourable to themselves, and fraught with high advantages to the progress of society. The favour of the Great supplied the want of public encouragement, and fostered talent which otherwise might never have produced its important and inappreciable fruits. But it had been better for France, her nobility, and her literature, had the patronage been extended in some manner which did not intimately associate the two classes of men. The want of independence of circumstances is a severe if not an absolute

²⁷ Ségur's Memoirs, vol. i., p. 39.

check to independence of spirit; and thus it often happened, that, to gratify the passions of their protectors, or to advance their interest, the men of letters were involved in the worst and most scandalous labyrinths of *tracasserie*, slander, and malignity; that they were divided into desperate factions against each other, and reduced to practise all those arts of dissimulation, flattery, and intrigue, which are the greatest shame of the literary profession.

FRENCH LITERATURE AND PHILOSOPHY.

As the eighteenth century advanced, the men of literature rose in importance, and, aware of their own increasing power in a society which was dependent on them for intellectual gratification, they supported each other in their claims to what began to be considered the dignity of a man of letters. This was soon carried into extremes, and assumed, even in the halls of their protectors, a fanatical violence of opinion, and a dogmatical mode of expression, which made the veteran Fontenelle declare himself terrified for the frightful degree of *certainty* that folks met with every where in society. The truth is, that men of letters, being usually men of mere theory, have no opportunity of measuring the opinions which they have adopted upon hypothetical reasoning, by the standard of practical experiment. They feel their mental superiority to those whom they live with, and become habitual believers in, and assertors of, their own infallibility. If moderation, command of passions and of temper, be part of philosophy, we seldom find less philosophy actually displayed, than by a philosopher in defence of a favourite theory.

Nor have we found that churchmen are so desirous of forming proselytes, or soldiers of extending conquests, as philosophers in making converts to their own opinions.

In France they had discovered the command which they had acquired over the public mind, and united as they were – and more especially the Encyclopedists,²⁸ – they augmented and secured that impression, by never permitting the doctrines which they wished to propagate to die away upon the public ear. For this purpose, they took care these should be echoed, like thunder amongst hills, from a hundred different points, presented in a hundred new lights, illustrated by a hundred various methods, until the public could no longer help receiving that as undeniable which they heard from so many different quarters. They could also direct every weapon of satirical hostility against those who ventured to combat their doctrines, and as their wrath was neither easily endured nor pacified, they drove from the field most of those authors, who, in opposition to their opinions, might have exerted themselves as champions of the Church and Monarchy.

We have already hinted at the disadvantages which literature experiences, when it is under the protection of private individuals of opulence, rather than of the public. But in yet another important respect, the air of *salons*, *ruelles* and *boudoirs* is fatal, in many cases, to the masculine spirit of philosophical self-denial which gives dignity to literary society. They who make part of the gay society of a corrupted metropolis, must lend

²⁸ Diderot, &c., the conductors of the celebrated *Encyclopédie*.

their countenance to follies and vices, if they do not themselves practise them; and hence, perhaps, French literature, more than any other in Europe, has been liable to the reproach of lending its powerful arm to undermine whatever was serious in morals, or hitherto considered as fixed in principle. Some of their greatest authors, even Montesquieu himself, have varied their deep reasonings on the origin of government, and the most profound problems of philosophy, with licentious tales tending to inflame the passions. Hence, partaking of the license of its professors, the degraded literature of modern times called in to its alliance that immorality, which not only Christian, but even heathen philosophy had considered as the greatest obstacle to a pure, wise, and happy state of existence. The licentiousness which walked abroad in such disgusting and undisguised nakedness, was a part of the unhappy bequest left by the Regent Duke of Orleans to the country which he governed. The decorum of the court during the times of Louis XIV. had prevented such excesses; if there was enough of vice, it was at least decently veiled. But the conduct of Orleans and his minions was marked with open infamy, deep enough to have called down, in the age of miracles, an immediate judgment from Heaven; and crimes which the worst of the Roman emperors would have at least hidden in his solitary Isle of Caprea, were acted as publicly as if men had had no eyes, or God no thunderbolts.²⁹

²⁹ Lacretelle Hist. de France, tom. i., p. 105; Mémoires de Mad. Du Barry, tom. ii., p. 3.

From this filthy Cocytus flowed those streams of impurity which disgraced France during the reign of Louis XV., and which, notwithstanding the example of a prince who was himself a model of domestic virtue, continued in that of Louis XVI. to infect society, morals, and, above all, literature. We do not here allude merely to those lighter pieces of indecency in which humour and fancy outrun the bounds of delicacy. These are to be found in the literature of most nations, and are generally in the hands of mere libertines and men of pleasure, so well acquainted with the practice of vice, that the theory cannot make them worse than they are. But there was a strain of voluptuous and seducing immorality which pervaded not only the lighter and gayer compositions of the French, but tinged the writings of those who called the world to admire them as poets of the highest mood, or to listen as to philosophers of the most lofty pretensions. Voltaire, Rousseau, Diderot, Montesquieu, – names which France must always esteem her highest honour, – were so guilty in this particular, that the young and virtuous must either altogether abstain from the works which are every where the topic of ordinary discussion and admiration, or must peruse much that is hurtful to delicacy, and dangerous to morals, in the formation of their future character. The latter alternative was universally adopted; for the curious will read as the thirsty will drink, though the cup and page be polluted.

So far had an indifference to delicacy influenced the society of France, and so widely spread was this habitual impurity

of language and ideas, especially among those who pretended to philosophy, that Madame Roland, a woman admirable for courage and talents, and not, so far as appears, vicious in her private morals, not only mentions the profligate novels of Louvet as replete with the graces of imagination, the salt of criticism, and the tone of philosophy, but affords the public, in her own person, details with which a courtesan of the higher class should be unwilling to season her private conversation.³⁰

This license, with the corruption of morals, of which it is both the sign and the cause, leads directly to feelings the most inconsistent with manly and virtuous patriotism. Voluptuousness, and its consequences, render the libertine incapable of relish for what is simply and abstractedly beautiful or sublime, whether in literature or in the arts, and destroy the taste, while they degrade and blunt the understanding. But, above all, such libertinism leads to the exclusive pursuit of selfish gratification, for egotism is its foundation and its essence. Egotism is necessarily the very reverse of patriotism, since the one principle is founded exclusively upon the individual's pursuit of his own peculiar objects of pleasure or advantage, while the other demands a sacrifice, not only of these individual pursuits, but of fortune and life itself, to the cause of the public weal. Patriotism has,

³⁰ The particulars we allude to, though suppressed in the second edition of Madame Roland's *Mémoires*, are restored in the "Collection des *Mémoires relatifs à la Révolution Française*," published at Paris, [56 vols. 8vo.] This is fair play; for if the details be disgusting, the light which they cast upon the character of the author is too valuable to be lost. — S.

accordingly, always been found to flourish in that state of society which is most favourable to the stern and manly virtues of self-denial, temperance, chastity, contempt of luxury, patient exertion, and elevated contemplation; and the public spirit of a nation has invariably borne a just proportion to its private morals.

INFIDELITY.

Religion cannot exist where immorality generally prevails, any more than a light can burn where the air is corrupted; and, accordingly, infidelity was so general in France, as to predominate in almost every rank of society. The errors of the Church of Rome, as we have already noticed, connected as they are with her ambitious attempts towards dominion over men, in their temporal as well as spiritual capacity, had long become the argument of the philosopher, and the jest of the satirist; but in exploding these pretensions, and holding them up to ridicule, the philosophers of the age involved with them the general doctrines of Christianity itself; nay, some went so far as not only to deny inspiration, but to extinguish, by their sophistry, the lights of natural religion, implanted in our bosoms as a part of our birth-right. Like the disorderly rabble at the time of the Reformation, (but with infinitely deeper guilt,) they not only pulled down the symbols of idolatry, which ignorance or priestcraft had introduced into the Christian Church, but sacrilegiously defaced and desecrated the altar itself. This work the philosophers, as they termed themselves, carried on with such an unlimited and eager zeal, as plainly to show that infidelity,

as well as divinity, hath its fanaticism. An envenomed fury against religion and all its doctrines; a promptitude to avail themselves of every circumstance by which Christianity could be misrepresented; an ingenuity in mixing up their opinions in works, which seemed the least fitting to involve such discussions, above all, a pertinacity in slandering, ridiculing, and vilifying all who ventured to oppose their principles, distinguished the correspondents in this celebrated conspiracy against a religion, which, however it may be defaced by human inventions, breathes only that peace on earth, and good will to the children of men, which was proclaimed by Heaven at its divine origin.

If these prejudiced and envenomed opponents had possessed half the desire of truth, or half the benevolence towards mankind, which were eternally on their lips, they would have formed the true estimate of the spirit of Christianity, not from the use which had been made of the mere name by ambitious priests or enthusiastic fools, but by its vital effects upon mankind at large. They would have seen, that under its influence a thousand brutal and sanguinary superstitions had died away; that polygamy had been abolished, and with polygamy all the obstacles which it offers to domestic happiness, as well as to the due education of youth, and the natural and gradual civilisation of society. They must then have owned, that slavery, which they regarded, or affected to regard, with such horror, had first been gradually ameliorated, and finally abolished by the influence of the Christian doctrines – that there was no one virtue teaching

to elevate mankind or benefit society, which was not enjoined by the precepts they endeavoured to misrepresent and weaken – no one vice by which humanity is degraded and society endangered, upon which Christianity hath not imposed a solemn anathema. They might also, in their capacity of philosophers, have considered the peculiar aptitude of the Christian religion, not only to all ranks and conditions of mankind, but to all climates and to all stages of society. Nor ought it to have escaped them, that the system contains within itself a key to those difficulties, doubts, and mysteries, by which the human mind is agitated, so soon as it is raised beyond the mere objects which interest the senses. Milton has made the maze of metaphysics, and the bewildering state of mind which they engender, a part of the employment, and perhaps of the punishment, of the lower regions.³¹ Christianity alone offers a clew to this labyrinth, a solution to these melancholy and discouraging doubts; and however its doctrines may be hard to unaided flesh and blood, yet explaining as they do the system of the universe, which without them is so incomprehensible, and through their practical influence rendering men in all ages more worthy to act their part in the general plan, it seems wonderful how those, whose professed pursuit was wisdom, should have looked on religion not alone with that indifference, which was the only feeling evinced

³¹ "Others apart sat on a hill retired, In thoughts more elevate, and reason'd high Of providence, foreknowledge, will, and fate, Fix'd fate, free-will, foreknowledge absolute, And found no end, in wand'ring mazes lost." Par. Lost, b. ii.

by the heathen philosophers towards the gross mythology of their time, but with hatred, malice, and all uncharitableness. One would rather have expected, that, after such a review, men professing the real spirit which searches after truth and wisdom, if unhappily they were still unable to persuade themselves that a religion so worthy of the Deity (if such an expression may be used) had emanated directly from revelation, might have had the modesty to lay their finger on their lip and distrust their own judgment, instead of disturbing the faith of others; or, if confirmed in their incredulity, might have taken the leisure to compute at least what was to be gained by rooting up a tree which bore such goodly fruits, without having the means of replacing it by aught which could produce the same advantage to the commonwealth.

Unhappily blinded by self-conceit, heated with the ardour of controversy, gratifying their literary pride by becoming members of a league, in which kings and princes were included, and procuring followers by flattering the vanity of some, and stimulating the cupidity of others, the men of the most distinguished parts in France became allied in a sort of anti-crusade against Christianity, and indeed against religious principles of every kind. How they succeeded is too universally known; and when it is considered that these men of letters, who ended by degrading the morals, and destroying the religion of so many of the citizens of France, had been first called into public estimation by the patronage of the higher orders, it is impossible

not to think of the Israelitish champion, who, brought into the house of Dagon to make sport for the festive assembly, ended by pulling it down upon the heads of the guests – and upon his own.

We do not tax the whole nation of France with being infirm in religious faith, and relaxed in morals; still less do we aver that the Revolution, which broke forth in that country, owed its rise exclusively to the license and infidelity, which were but too current there. The necessity of a great change in the principles of the ancient French monarchy, had its source in the usurpations of preceding kings over the liberties of the subject, and the opportunity for effecting this change was afforded by the weakness and pecuniary distresses of the present government. These would have existed had the French court, and her higher orders, retained the simple and virtuous manners of Sparta, united with the strong and pure faith of primitive Christians. The difference lay in this, that a simple, virtuous, and religious people would have rested content with such changes and alterations in the constitution of their government as might remove the evils of which they had just and pressing reason to complain. They would have endeavoured to redress obvious and practical errors in the body politic, without being led into extremes either by the love of realising visionary theories, the vanity of enforcing their own particular philosophical or political doctrines, or the selfish arguments of demagogues, who, in the prospect of bettering their own situation by wealth, or obtaining scope for their ambition, aspired, in the words of the dramatic poet, to throw the elements

of society into confusion, and thus

"disturb the peace of all the world,
To rule it when 'twas wildest."

It was to such men as these last that Heaven, in punishment of the sins of France and of Europe, and perhaps to teach mankind a dreadful lesson, abandoned the management of the French Revolution, the original movements of which, so far as they went to secure to the people the restoration of their natural liberty, and the abolition of the usurpations of the crown, had become not only desirable through the change of times, and by the influence of public opinion, but peremptorily necessary and inevitable.

FEUDAL SYSTEM.

The feudal system of France, like that of the rest of Europe, had, in its original composition, all the germs of national freedom. The great peers, in whose hands the common defence was reposed, acknowledged the king's power as *suzerain*, obeyed his commands as their military leader, and attended his courts as their supreme judge; but recognised no despotic authority in the crown, and were prompt to defend the slightest encroachment upon their own rights. If they themselves were not equally tender of the rights and liberties of their own vassals, their acts of encroachment flowed not from the feudal system, but from its imperfections. The tendency and spirit of these singular institutions, were to preserve to each individual his just and

natural rights; but a system, almost purely military, was liable to be frequently abused by the most formidable soldier, and was, besides, otherwise ill fitted to preserve rights which were purely civil. It is not necessary to trace the progress from the days of Louis XIII. downwards, by which ambitious monarchs, seconded by able and subtle ministers, contrived to emancipate themselves from the restraints of their powerful vassals, or by which the descendants of these high feudatories, who had been the controllers of the prince so soon as he outstepped the bounds of legitimate authority, were now ranked around the throne in the capacity of mere courtiers or satellites, who derived their lustre solely from the favour of royalty. This unhappy and shortsighted policy had, however, accomplished its end, and the crown had concentrated within its prerogative almost the entire liberties of the French nation; and now, like an overgorged animal of prey, had reason to repent its fatal voracity, while it lay almost helpless, exposed to the assaults of those whom it had despoiled.

We have already observed, that for a considerable time the Frenchman's love of his country had been transferred to the crown; that his national delight in martial glory fixed his attachment upon the monarch as the leader of his armies; and that this feeling had supported the devotion of the nation to Louis XIV., not only during his victories, but even amid his reverses. But the succeeding reign had less to impose on the imagination. The erection of a palace obtains for the nation the praise of magnificence, and the celebration of public and splendid festivals

gives the people at least the pleasure of a holiday; the pensioning artists and men of letters, again, is honourable to the country which fosters the arts; but the court of Louis XV., undiminished in expense, was also selfish in its expenditure. The enriching of needy favourites, their relations, and their parasites, had none of the dazzling munificence of the Grand Monarque; and while the taxes became daily more oppressive on the subjects, the mode in which the revenue was employed not only became less honourable to the court, and less creditable to the country, but lost the dazzle and show which gives the lower orders pleasure as the beholders of a pageant.

The consolation which the imagination of the French had found in the military honour of their nation, seemed also about to fail them. The bravery of the troops remained the same, but the genius of the commanders, and the fortune of the monarch under whose auspices they fought, had in a great measure abandoned them, and the destiny of France seemed to be on the wane. The victory of Fontenoy³² was all that was to be placed in opposition to the numerous disasters of the Seven Years' War, in which France was almost everywhere else defeated; and it was little wonder, that in a reign attended with so many subjects of mortification, the enthusiastic devotion of the people to the sovereign should begin to give way. The king had engrossed so much power in his own person, that he had become as it were

³² The battle was fought May 1, 1745, between the French, under Marshal Saxe, and the allies, under William Duke of Cumberland.

personally responsible for every miscarriage and defeat which the country underwent. Such is the risk incurred by absolute monarchs, who are exposed to all the popular obloquy for maladministration, from which, in limited governments, kings are in a great measure screened by the intervention of the other powers of the constitution, or by the responsibility of ministers for the measures which they advise; while he that has ascended to the actual peak and extreme summit of power, has no barrier left to secure him from the tempest.

Another and most powerful cause fanned the rising discontent, with which the French of the eighteenth century began to regard the government under which they lived. Like men awakened from a flattering dream, they compared their own condition with that of the subjects of free states, and perceived that they had either never enjoyed, or had been gradually robbed of, the chief part of the most valuable privileges and immunities to which man may claim a natural right. They had no national representation of any kind, and but for the slender barrier offered by the courts of justice, or parliaments, as they were called, were subject to unlimited exactions on the sole authority of the sovereign. The property of the nation was therefore at the disposal of the crown, which might increase taxes to any amount, and cause them to be levied by force, if force was necessary. The personal freedom of the citizen was equally exposed to aggressions by *lettres de cachet*.³³ The French people, in short, had neither, in

³³ Private letters or mandates, issued under the royal *signet*, for the apprehension of

the strict sense, liberty nor property, and if they did not suffer all the inconveniences in practice which so evil a government announces, it was because public opinion, the softened temper of the age, and the good disposition of the kings themselves, did not permit the scenes of cruelty and despotism to be revived in the eighteenth century, which Louis XI. had practised three ages before.

These abuses, and others arising out of the disproportioned privileges of the noblesse and the clergy, who were exempted from contributing to the necessities of the state; the unequal mode of levying the taxes, and other great errors of the constitution; above all, the total absorption of every right and authority in the person of the sovereign, – these were too gross in their nature, and too destructive in their consequences, to have escaped deep thought on the part of reflecting persons, and hatred and dislike from those who suffered more or less under the practical evils.

SUPPRESSION OF FREE DISCUSSION.

They had not, in particular, eluded the observation and censure of the acute reasoners and deep thinkers, who had already become the guiding spirits of the age; but the despotism under which they lived prevented those speculations from assuming a practical and useful character. In a free country, the wise and the learned are not only permitted, but invited, to

examine the institutions under which they live, to defend them against the suggestions of rash innovators, or to propose such alterations as the lapse of time and change of manners may render necessary. Their disquisitions are, therefore, usefully and beneficially directed to the repair of the existing government, not to its demolition, and if they propose alteration in parts, it is only for the purpose of securing the rest of the fabric. But in France, no opportunity was permitted of free discussion on politics, any more than on matters of religion.

An essay upon the French monarchy, showing by what means the existing institutions might have been brought more into union with the wishes and wants of the people, must have procured for its author a place in the Bastile; and yet subsequent events have shown, that a system, which might have introduced prudently and gradually into the decayed frame of the French government the spirit of liberty, which was originally inherent in every feudal monarchy, would have been the most valuable present which political wisdom could have rendered to the country. The bonds which pressed so heavily on the subject might thus have been gradually slackened, and at length totally removed, without the perilous expedient of casting them all loose at once. But the philosophers, who had certainly talents sufficient for the purpose, were not permitted to apply to the state of the French government the original principles on which it was founded, or to trace the manner in which usurpations and abuses had taken place, and propose a mode by which, without varying its

form, those encroachments might be restrained, and those abuses corrected. An author was indeed at liberty to speculate at any length upon general doctrines of government; he might imagine to himself a Utopia or Atalantis, and argue upon abstract ideas of the rights in which government originates; but on no account was he permitted to render any of his lucubrations practically useful, by adapting them to the municipal regulations of France. The political sage was placed, with regard to his country, in the condition of a physician prescribing for the favourite Sultana of some jealous despot, whom he is required to cure without seeing his patient, and without obtaining any accurate knowledge of her malady, its symptoms, and its progress. In this manner the theory of government was kept studiously separated from the practice. The political philosopher might, if he pleased, speculate upon the former, but he was prohibited, under severe personal penalties, to illustrate the subject by any allusion to the latter. Thus, the eloquent and profound work of Montesquieu professed, indeed, to explain the general rights of the people, and the principles upon which government itself rested, but his pages show no mode by which these could be resorted to for the reformation of the constitution of his country. He laid before the patient a medical treatise on disease in general, instead of a special prescription; applying to his peculiar habits and distemper.

In consequence of these unhappy restrictions upon open and manly political discussion, the French government, in its actual state, was never represented as capable of either improvement or

regeneration; and while general and abstract doctrines of original freedom were every where the subject of eulogy, it was never considered for a moment in what manner these new and more liberal principles could be applied to the improvement of the existing system. The natural conclusion must have been, that the monarchical government in France was either perfection in itself, and consequently stood in need of no reformation, or that it was so utterly inconsistent with the liberties of the people as to be susceptible of none. No one was hardy enough to claim for it the former character, and, least of all, those who presided in its councils, and seemed to acknowledge the imperfection of the system, by prohibiting all discussion on the subject. It seemed, therefore, to follow, as no unfair inference, that to obtain the advantages which the new elementary doctrines held forth, and which were so desirable and so much desired, a total abolition of the existing government to its very foundation, was an indispensable preliminary; and there is little doubt that this opinion prevailed so generally at the time of the Revolution, as to prevent any firm or resolute stand being made in defence even of such of the actual institutions of France, as might have been amalgamated with the proposed reform.

ANGLOMANIA.

While all practical discussion of the constitution of France, as a subject either above or beneath philosophical inquiry, was thus cautiously omitted in those works which pretended to treat of civil rights, that of England, with its counterpoises and checks,

its liberal principle of equality of rights, the security which it affords for personal liberty and individual property, and the free opportunities of discussion upon every topic, became naturally the subject of eulogy amongst those who were awakening their countrymen to a sense of the benefits of national freedom. The time was past, when, as in the days of Louis XIV., the French regarded the institutions of the English with contempt, as fit only for merchants and shopkeepers, but unworthy of a nation of warriors, whose pride was in their subordination to their nobles, as that of the nobles consisted in obedience to their king. That prejudice had long passed away, and Frenchmen now admired, not without envy, the noble system of masculine freedom which had been consolidated by the successive efforts of so many patriots in so many ages. A sudden revulsion seemed to take place in their general feelings towards their neighbours, and France, who had so long dictated to all Europe in matters of fashion, seemed now herself disposed to borrow the more simple forms and fashions of her ancient rival. The spirit of imitating the English, was carried even to the verge of absurdity.³⁴ Not only did Frenchmen of quality adopt the round hat and frock coat, which set etiquette at defiance – not only had they English carriages, dogs, and horses, but even English butlers were hired, that the wine, which was the growth of France, might be placed on the table with the grace peculiar to England.³⁵ These were,

³⁴ Ségur, tom. i., p. 268; ii., p. 24.

³⁵ One striking feature of this Anglomania was the general institution of *Clubs*, and

indeed, the mere ebullitions of fashion carried to excess, but, like the foam on the crest of the billow, they argued the depth and strength of the wave beneath, and, insignificant in themselves, were formidable as evincing the contempt with which the French now regarded all those forms and usages, which had hitherto been thought peculiar to their own country. This principle of imitation rose to such extravagance, that it was happily termed the *Anglomania*.³⁶

While the young French gallants were emulously employed in this mimicry of the English fashions, relinquishing the external signs of rank which always produced some effect on the vulgar, men of thought and reflection were engaged in analyzing those principles of the British government, on which the national character has been formed, and which have afforded her the

the consequent desertion of female society. "If our happy inconstancy," wrote Baron de Grimm, in 1790, "did not give room to hope that the fashion will not be everlasting, it might certainly be apprehended that the taste for clubs would lead insensibly to a very marked revolution both in the spirit and morals of the nation; but that disposition, which we possess by nature, of growing tired of every thing, affords some satisfaction in all our follies." —*Correspondence*.

³⁶ An instance is given, ludicrous in itself, but almost prophetic, when connected with subsequent events. A courtier, deeply infected with the fashion of the time, was riding beside the king's carriage at a full trot, without observing that his horse's heels threw the mud into the royal vehicle. "Vous me crottez, monsieur," said the king. The horseman, considering the words were "Vous trottez," and that the prince complimented his equestrian performance, answered, "Oui, sire, à l'Angloise." The good-humoured monarch drew up the glass, and only said to the gentleman in the carriage, "Voilà une Anglomanie bien forte!" Alas! the unhappy prince lived to see the example of England, in her most dismal period, followed to a much more formidable extent. — S.

means of rising from so many reverses, and maintaining a sway among the kingdoms of Europe, so disproportioned to her population and extent.

AMERICAN WAR.

To complete the conquest of English opinions, even in France herself, over those of French origin, came the consequences of the American War. Those true Frenchmen who disdained to borrow the sentiments of political freedom from England, might now derive them from a country with whom France could have no rivalry, but in whom, on the contrary, she recognised the enemy of the island, in policy or prejudice termed her own natural foe. The deep sympathy manifested by the French in the success of the American insurgents, though diametrically opposite to the interests of their government, or perhaps of the nation at large, was compounded of too many ingredients influencing all ranks, to be overcome or silenced by cold considerations of political prudence. The nobility, always eager of martial distinction, were in general desirous of war, and most of them, the pupils of the celebrated *Encyclopédie*, were doubly delighted to lend their swords to the cause of freedom. The statesmen imagined that they saw, in the success of the American insurgents, the total downfall of the English empire, or at least a far descent from that pinnacle of dignity which she had attained at the Peace of 1763, and they eagerly urged Louis XVI. to profit by the opportunity, hitherto sought in vain, of humbling a rival so formidable. In the courtly circles, and particularly in that which

surrounded Marie Antoinette, the American deputation had the address or good fortune to become popular, by mingling in them with manners and sentiments entirely opposite to those of courts and courtiers, and exhibiting, amid the extremity of refinement, in dress, speech, and manners, a republican simplicity, rendered interesting both by the contrast, and by the talents which Benjamin Franklin and Silas Deane evinced, not only in the business of diplomacy, but in the intercourse of society.³⁷ Impelled by these and other combining causes, a despotic government, whose subjects were already thoroughly imbued with opinions hostile to its constitution in Church and State, with a discontented people, and a revenue wellnigh bankrupt, was thrust, as if by fatality, into a contest conducted upon principles most adverse to its own existence.

The king, almost alone, whether dreading the expense of a ruinous war, whether alarmed already at the progress of democratic principles, or whether desirous of observing good faith with England, considered that there ought to be a stronger motive for war, than barely the opportunity of waging it with success; the king, therefore, almost alone, opposed this great political error. It was not the only occasion in which, wiser than his counsellors, he nevertheless yielded up to their urgency opinions founded in unbiassed morality, and unpretending common sense. A good judgment, and a sound moral sense, were the principal attributes of this excellent prince, and happy

³⁷ See Ségur, tom. i., p. 101.

it would have been had they been mingled with more confidence in himself, and a deeper distrust of others.

Other counsels prevailed over the private opinion of Louis – the war was commenced – successfully carried on, and victoriously concluded. We have seen that the French auxiliaries brought with them to America minds apt to receive, if not already³⁸ imbued with, those principles of freedom for which the colonies had taken up arms against the mother country, and it is not to be wondered if they returned to France strongly prepossessed in favour of a cause, for which they had encountered danger, and in which they had reaped honour.³⁹

The inferior officers of the French auxiliary army, chiefly men of birth, agreeably to the existing rules of the French service, belonged, most of them, to the class of country nobles, who, from causes, already noticed, were far from being satisfied with the system which rendered their rise difficult, in the only profession which their prejudices, and those of France, permitted

³⁸ By some young enthusiasts, the assumption of republican habits was carried to all the heights of revolutionary affectation and extravagance. Ségur mentions a young coxcomb, named Mauduit, who already distinguished himself by renouncing the ordinary courtesies of life, and insisting on being called by his Christian and surname, without the usual addition of Monsieur. – S. – "Mauduit's career was short, and his end an unhappy one; for being employed at St. Domingo, he threw himself among a party of revolters, and was assassinated by the negroes." – Ségur.

³⁹ "The passion for republican institutions infected even the courtiers of the palace. Thunders of applause shook the theatre of Versailles at the celebrated lines of Voltaire — "Je suis fils de Brutus, et je porte en mon cœurLa liberté gravée et les rois en horreur." Ségur, tom. i., p. 253.

them to assume. The proportion of plebeians who had intruded themselves, by connivance and indirect means, into the military ranks, looked with eagerness to some change which should give a free and open career to their courage and their ambition, and were proportionally discontented with regulations which were recently adopted, calculated to render their rise in the army more difficult than before.⁴⁰ In these sentiments were united the whole of the non-commissioned officers, and the ranks of the common soldiery, all of whom, confiding in their own courage and fortune, now became indignant at those barriers which closed against them the road to military advancement, and to superior command. The officers of superior rank, who derived their descent from the high noblesse, were chiefly young men of ambitious enterprise and warm imaginations, whom not only a love of honour, but an enthusiastic feeling of devotion to the new philosophy, and the political principles which it inculcated, had called to arms. Amongst these were Rochambeau, La Fayette, the Lameths, Chastellux, Ségur, and others of exalted rank, but of no less exalted feelings for the popular cause. They readily forgot, in the full current of their enthusiasm, that their own rank in society was endangered by the progress of popular opinions; or,

⁴⁰ Plebeians formerly got into the army by obtaining the subscription of four men of noble birth, attesting their patrician descent; and such certificates, however false, could always be obtained for a small sum. But by a regulation of the Count Ségur, after the American war, candidates for the military profession were obliged to produce a certificate of noble birth from the king's genealogist, in addition to the attestations which were formerly held sufficient. — S.

if they at all remembered that their interest was thus implicated, it was with the generous disinterestedness of youth, prompt to sacrifice to the public advantage whatever of selfish immunities was attached to their own condition.

The return of the French army from America thus brought a strong body of auxiliaries to the popular and now prevalent opinions; and the French love of military glory, which had so long been the safeguard of the throne, became intimately identified with that distinguished portion of the army which had been so lately and so successfully engaged in defending the claims of the people against the rights of an established government.⁴¹ Their laurels were green and newly gathered, while those which had been obtained in the cause of monarchy were of an ancient date, and tarnished by the reverses of the Seven Years' War. The reception of the returned soldiery and their leaders was proportionally enthusiastic; and it became soon evident, that when the eventful struggle betwixt the existing monarchy and its adversaries should commence, the latter were to have the support in sentiment, and probably in action, of that distinguished part of the army, which had of late maintained and recovered the military character of France. It was, accordingly, from its ranks that the Revolution derived many of its most formidable champions, and it was their example which detached a great proportion of the French soldiers from their natural allegiance to the sovereign, which had been for so many ages expressed in

⁴¹ Lacretelle, tom. v., p. 341.

their war-cry of "Vive le Roi," and which was revived, though with an altered object, in that of "Vive l'Empereur."

There remains but to notice the other proximate cause of the Revolution, but which is so intimately connected with its rise and progress, that we cannot disjoin it from our brief review of the revolutionary movements to which it gave the first decisive impulse.

CHAPTER III

Proximate Cause of the Revolution – Deranged State of the Finances – Reforms in the Royal Household – System of Turgot and Necker – Necker's Exposition of the State of the Public Revenue – The Red-Book – Necker displaced – Succeeded by Calonne – General State of the Revenue – Assembly of the Notables – Calonne dismissed – Archbishop of Sens Administrator of the Finances – The King's Contest with the Parliament – Bed of Justice – Resistance of the Parliament and general Disorder in the Kingdom – Vacillating Policy of the Minister – Royal Sitting – Scheme of forming a Cour Plénière – It proves ineffectual – Archbishop of Sens retires, and is succeeded by Necker – He resolves to convoke the States General – Second Assembly of Notables previous to Convocation of the States – Questions as to the Numbers of which the Tiers Etat should consist, and the Mode in which the Estates should deliberate.

We have already compared the monarchy of France to an ancient building, which, however decayed by the wasting injuries of time, may long remain standing from the mere adhesion of its parts, unless it is assailed by some sudden and unexpected shock, the immediate violence of which completes the ruin which the lapse of ages had only prepared. Or if its materials have become dry and combustible, still they may long wait for the spark

which is to awake a general conflagration. Thus, the monarchical government of France, notwithstanding the unsoundness of all its parts, might have for some time continued standing and unconsumed, nay, with timely and judicious repairs, might have been entire at this moment, had the state of the finances of the kingdom permitted the monarch to temporize with the existing discontents and the progress of new opinions, without increasing the taxes of a people already greatly overburdened, and now become fully sensible that these burdens were unequally imposed, and sometimes prodigally dispensed.

DERANGEMENT OF THE FINANCES.

A government, like an individual, may be guilty of many acts, both of injustice and folly, with some chance of impunity, provided it possess wealth enough to command partisans and to silence opposition; and history shows us, that as, on the one hand, wealthy and money-saving monarchs have usually been able to render themselves most independent of their subjects, so, on the other, it is from needy princes, and when exchequers are empty, that the people have obtained grants favourable to freedom in exchange for their supplies. The period of pecuniary distress in a government, if it be that when the subjects are most exposed to oppression, is also the crisis in which they have the best chance of recovering their political rights.

It is in vain that the constitution of a despotic government endeavours, in its forms, to guard against the dangers of such conjunctures, by vesting in the sovereign the most complete and

unbounded right to the property of his subjects. This doctrine, however ample in theory, cannot in practice be carried beyond certain bounds, without producing either privy conspiracy or open insurrection, being the violent symptoms of the outraged feelings and exhausted patience of the subject, which, in absolute monarchies, supply the want of all regular political checks upon the power of the crown. Whenever the point of human sufferance is exceeded, the despot must propitiate the wrath of an insurgent people with the head of his minister, or he may tremble for his own.⁴²

In constitutions of a less determined despotical character, there almost always arises some power of check or control, however anomalous, which balances or counteracts the arbitrary exactions of the sovereign, instead of the actual resistance of the subjects, as at Fez or Constantinople. This was the case in France.

No constitution could have been more absolute in theory than that of France, for two hundred years past, in the matter of finance; but yet in practice there existed a power of control in the Parliaments, and particularly in that of Paris. These courts, though strictly speaking they were constituted only for the administration of justice, had forced themselves, or been forced by circumstances, into a certain degree of political power, which they exercised in control of the crown, in the imposition of new

⁴² When Buonaparte expressed much regret and anxiety on account of the assassination of the Emperor Paul, he was comforted by Fouché with words to the following effect: – "Que voulez vous enfin? C'est une mode de destitution propre à ce pais-là!" – S.

taxes. It was agreed on all hands, that the royal edicts, enforcing such new impositions, must be registered by the Parliaments; but while the crown held the registering such edicts to be an act purely ministerial, and the discharge of a function imposed by official duty, the magistrates insisted, on the other hand, that they possessed the power of deliberating and remonstrating, nay, of refusing to register the royal edicts. The Parliaments exercised this power of control on various occasions; and as their interference was always on behalf of the subject, the practice, however anomalous, was sanctioned by public opinion; and, in the absence of all other representatives of the people, France naturally looked up to the magistrates as the protectors of her rights, and as the only power which could offer even the semblance of resistance to the arbitrary increase of the burdens of the state. These functionaries cannot be charged with carelessness or cowardice in the discharge of their duty; and as taxes increased and became at the same time less productive, the opposition of the Parliaments became more formidable. Louis XIV. endeavoured to break their spirit by suppression of their court, and banishment of its members from Paris; but, notwithstanding this temporary victory, he is said to have predicted that his successor might not come off from the renewed contest so successfully.

Louis XVI., with the plain well-meaning honesty which marked his character, restored the Parliaments to their constitutional powers immediately on his accession to the throne,

having the generosity to regard their resistance to his grandfather as a merit rather than an offence. In the meanwhile, the revenue of the kingdom had fallen into a most disastrous condition. The continued and renewed expense of unsuccessful wars, the supplying the demands of a luxurious court, the gratifying hungry courtiers, and enriching needy favourites, had occasioned large deficits upon the public income of each successive year. The ministers, meanwhile, anxious to provide for the passing moment of their own administration, were satisfied to put off the evil day by borrowing money at heavy interest, and leasing out, in security of these loans, the various sources of revenue to the farmers-general. On their part, these financiers used the government as bankrupt prodigals are treated by usurious money-brokers, who, feeding their extravagance with the one hand, with the other wring out of their ruined fortunes the most unreasonable recompense for their advances. By a long succession of these ruinous loans, and the various rights granted to guarantee them, the whole finances of France appear to have fallen into total confusion, and presented an inextricable chaos to those who endeavoured to bring them into order. The farmers-general, therefore, however obnoxious to the people, who considered with justice that their overgrown fortunes were nourished by the life-blood of the community, continued to be essentially necessary to the state, the expenses of which they alone could find means of defraying; – thus supporting the government, although Mirabeau said with truth, it was only in the sense in which a rope supports

a hanged man.

Louis XVI., fully sensible of the disastrous state of the public revenue, did all he could to contrive a remedy. He limited his personal expenses, and those of his household, with a rigour which approached to parsimony, and dimmed the necessary splendour of the throne. He abolished many pensions, and by doing so not only disobliged those who were deprived of the instant enjoyment of those gratuities, but lost the attachment of the much more numerous class of expectants, who served the court in the hope of obtaining similar gratifications in their turn.⁴³ Lastly, he dismissed a very large proportion of his household troops and body-guards, affording another subject of discontent to the nobles, out of whose families these corps were recruited, and destroying with his own hand a force devotedly attached to the royal person, and which, in the hour of popular fury, would have been a barrier of inappreciable value. Thus, it was the misfortune of this well-meaning prince, only to weaken his own cause and endanger his safety, by those sacrifices

⁴³ Louis XV. had the arts if not the virtues of a monarch. He asked one of his ministers what he supposed might be the price of the carriage in which they were sitting. The minister, making a great allowance for the monarch's paying *en prince*, yet guessed within two-thirds less than the real sum. When the king named the actual price, the statesman exclaimed, but the monarch cut him short. "Do not attempt," he said, "to reform the expenses of my household. There are too many, and too great men, who have their share in that extortion, and to make a reformation would give too much discontent. No minister can attempt it with success or with safety." This is the picture of the waste attending a despotic government: the cup which is filled to the very brim cannot be lifted to the lips without wasting the contents. – S.

intended to relieve the burdens of the people, and supply the wants of the state.

ECONOMICAL REFORMS.

The king adopted a broader and more effectual course of reform, by using the advice of upright and skilful ministers, to introduce, as far as possible, some degree of order into the French finances. Turgot,⁴⁴ Malesherbes,⁴⁵ and Necker,⁴⁶ were persons of unquestionable skill, of sound views, and undisputed integrity; and although the last-named minister finally sunk in public esteem, it was only because circumstances had excited such an extravagant opinion of his powers, as could not have been met and realized by those of the first financier who ever lived. These virtuous and patriotic statesmen did all in their power

⁴⁴ Turgot was born at Paris in 1727. Called to the head of the Finances in 1774, he excited the jealousy of the courtiers by his reforms, and of the parliaments by the abolition of the *corvées*. Beset on all sides, Louis, in 1776, dismissed him, observing at the same time, that "Turgot, and he alone, loved the people." Malesherbes said of him, that "he had the head of Bacon, and the heart of L'Hopital." He died in 1781.

⁴⁵ Malesherbes, the descendant of an illustrious family, was born at Paris in 1721. When Louis the Sixteenth ascended the throne, he was appointed minister of the interior, which he resigned on the retirement of his friend Turgot. He was called back into public life, at the crisis of the Revolution, to be the legal defender of his sovereign; but his pleadings only procured for himself the honour of perishing on the same scaffold in 1794, together with his daughter and grand-daughter.

⁴⁶ Necker was born at Geneva in 1732; he married, in 1764, Mademoiselle Curchod, the early object of Gibbon's affection, and by her had the daughter so celebrated as the Baroness de Staël Holstein. M. Necker settled in Paris, rose into high reputation as a banker, and was first called to office under the government in 1776. He died in 1804.

to keep afloat the vessel of the state, and prevent at least the increase of the deficit, which now arose yearly on the public accounts. They, and Necker in particular, introduced economy and retrenchment into all departments of the revenue, restored the public credit without increasing the national burdens, and, by obtaining loans on reasonable terms, were fortunate enough to find funds for the immediate support of the American war, expensive as it was, without pressing on the patience of the people by new impositions. Could this state of matters have been supported for some years, opportunities might in that time have occurred for adapting the French mode of government to the new lights which the age afforded. Public opinion, joined to the beneficence of the sovereign, had already wrought several important and desirable changes. Many obnoxious and oppressive laws had been expressly abrogated, or tacitly suffered to become obsolete, and there never sat a king upon the French or any other throne, more willing than Louis XVI. to sacrifice his own personal interest and prerogative to whatever seemed to be the benefit of the state. Even at the very commencement of his reign, and when obeying only the dictates of his own beneficence, he reformed the penal code of France, which then savoured of the barbarous times in which it had originated – he abolished the use of torture – he restored to freedom those prisoners of state, the mournful inhabitants of the Bastille, and other fortresses, who had been the victims of his grandfather's

jealousy – the compulsory labour called the *corvée*,⁴⁷ levied from the peasantry, and one principal source of popular discontent, had been abolished in some provinces and modified in others – and while the police was under the regulation of the sage and virtuous Malesherbes, its arbitrary powers had been seldom so exercised as to become the subject of complaint. In short, the monarch partook the influence of public opinion along with his subjects, and there seemed just reason to hope, that, had times remained moderate, the monarchy of France might have been reformed instead of being destroyed.

Unhappily, convulsions of the state became from day to day more violent, and Louis XVI., who possessed the benevolence and good intentions of his ancestor, Henry IV., wanted his military talents, and his political firmness. In consequence of this deficiency, the king suffered himself to be distracted by a variety of counsels; and vacillating, as all must who act more from a general desire to do that which is right, than upon any determined and well-considered system, he placed his power and his character at the mercy of the changeful course of events, which firmness might have at least combated, if it could not control. But it is remarkable, that Louis resembled Charles I. of England more than any of his own ancestors, in a want of self-confidence, which led to frequent alterations of mind and

⁴⁷ The *corvées*, or burdens imposed for the maintenance of the public roads, were bitterly complained of by the farmers. This iniquitous part of the financial system was abolished in 1774, by Turgot.

changes of measures, as well as in a tendency to uxoriousness, which enabled both Henrietta Marie, and Marie Antoinette, to use a fatal influence upon their counsels. Both sovereigns fell under the same suspicion of being deceitful and insincere, when perhaps Charles, but certainly Louis, only changed his course of conduct from a change of his own opinion, or from suffering himself to be over-persuaded, and deferring to the sentiments of others.

Few monarchs of any country, certainly, have changed their ministry, and with their ministry their counsels and measures, so often as Louis XVI.; and with this unhappy consequence, that he neither persevered in a firm and severe course of government long enough to inspire respect, nor in a conciliatory and yielding policy for a sufficient time to propitiate regard and confidence. It is with regret we notice this imperfection in a character otherwise so excellent; but it was one of the leading causes of the Revolution, that a prince, possessed of power too great to be either kept or resigned with safety, hesitated between the natural resolution to defend his hereditary prerogative, and the sense of justice which induced him to restore such part of it as had been usurped from the people by his ancestors. By adhering to the one course, he might have been the conqueror of the Revolution; by adopting the other, he had a chance to be its guide and governor; by hesitating between them, he became its victim.

It was in consequence of this vacillation of purpose that Louis, in 1781, sacrificed Turgot and Necker to the intrigues of the

court. These statesmen had formed a plan for new-modelling the financial part of the French monarchy, which, while it should gratify the people by admitting representatives on their part to some influence in the imposition of new taxes, might have released the king from the interference of the parliaments, (whose office of remonstrance, although valuable as a shelter from despotism, was often arbitrarily, and even factiously exercised,) and have transferred to the direct representatives of the people that superintendence, which ought never to have been in other hands.

For this purpose the ministers proposed to institute, in the several provinces of France, convocations of a representative nature, one-half of whom was to be chosen from the Commons, or Third Estate, and the other named by the nobles and clergy in equal proportions, and which assemblies, without having the right of rejecting the edicts imposing new taxes, were to apportion them amongst the subjects of their several provinces. This system contained in it much that was excellent, and might have opened the road for further improvements on the constitution; while, at the same time, it would probably, so early as 1781, have been received as a boon, by which the subjects were called to participate in the royal counsels, rather than as a concession extracted from the weakness of the sovereign, or from his despair of his own resources. It afforded also an opportunity, peculiarly desirable in France, of forming the minds of the people to the discharge of public duty. The British nation owe

much of the practical benefits of their constitution to the habits with which almost all men are trained to exercise some public right in head-courts, vestries, and other deliberative bodies, where their minds are habituated to the course of business, and accustomed to the manner in which it can be most regularly despatched. This advantage would have been supplied to the French by Necker's scheme.

But with all the advantages which it promised, this plan of provincial assemblies miscarried, owing to the emulous opposition of the Parliament of Paris, who did not choose that any other body than their own should be considered as the guardians of what remained in France of popular rights.

NECKER'S COMPTE RENDU.

Another measure of Necker was of more dubious policy. This was the printing and publishing of his Report to the Sovereign of the state of the revenues of France. The minister probably thought this display of candour, which, however proper in itself, was hitherto unknown in the French administration, might be useful to the King, whom it represented as acquiescing in public opinion, and appearing not only ready, but solicitous, to collect the sentiments of his subjects on the business of the state. Necker might also deem the *Compte Rendu* a prudent measure on his own account, to secure the popular favour, and maintain himself by the public esteem against the influence of court intrigue. Or lastly, both these motives might be mingled with the natural vanity of showing the world that France enjoyed, in the person

of Necker, a minister bold enough to penetrate into the labyrinth of confusion and obscurity which had been thought inextricable by all his predecessors, and was at length enabled to render to the sovereign and the people a detailed and balanced account of the state of their finances.

Neither did the result of the national balance-sheet appear so astounding as to require its being concealed as a state mystery. The deficit, or the balance, by which the expenses of government exceeded the revenue of the country, by no means indicated a desperate state of finance, or one which must either demand immense sacrifices, or otherwise lead to national bankruptcy. It did not greatly exceed the annual defalcation of two millions, a sum which, to a country so fertile as France, might even be termed trifling. At the same time, Necker brought forward a variety of reductions and economical arrangements, by which he proposed to provide for this deficiency, without either incurring debt or burdening the subject with additional taxes.

But although this general exposure of the expenses of the state, this appeal from the government to the people, had the air of a frank and generous proceeding, and was, in fact, a step to the great constitutional point of establishing in the nation and its representatives the sole power of granting supplies, there may be doubt whether it was not rather too hastily resorted to. Those from whose eyes the cataract has been removed, are for some time deprived of light, and in the end, it is supplied to them by limited degrees; but that glare which was at once poured on

the nation of France, served to dazzle as many as it illuminated. The *Compte Rendu* was the general subject of conversation, not only in coffee-houses and public promenades, but in saloons and ladies' boudoirs, and amongst society better qualified to discuss the merits of the last comedy, or any other frivolity of the day. The very array of figures had something ominous and terrible in it, and the word *deficit* was used, like the name of Marlborough of old, to frighten children with.

To most it intimated the total bankruptcy of the nation, and prepared many to act with the selfish and shortsighted license of sailors, who plunder the cargo of their own vessel in the act of shipwreck. Others saw, in the account of expenses attached to the person and dignity of the prince, a wasteful expenditure, which, in that hour of avowed necessity, a nation might well dispense with. Men began to number the guards and household pomp of the sovereign and his court, as the daughters of Lear did the train of their father. The reduction already commenced might be carried, thought these provident persons, yet farther: —

"What needs he five-and-twenty, ten, or five?"

And no doubt some, even at this early period, arrived at the ultimate conclusion,

"What needs ONE?"

Besides the domestic and household expenses of the

sovereign, which, so far as personal, were on the most moderate scale, the public mind was much more justly revolted at the large sum yearly squandered among needy courtiers and their dependents, or even less justifiably lavished upon those whose rank and fortune ought to have placed them far above adding to the burdens of the subjects. The king had endeavoured to abridge this list of gratuities and pensions, but the system of corruption which had prevailed for two centuries, was not to be abolished in an instant; the throne, already tottering, could not immediately be deprived of the band of stipendiary grandees whom it had so long maintained, and who afforded it their countenance in return, and it was perhaps impolitic to fix the attention of the public on a disclosure so peculiarly invidious, until the opportunity of correcting it should arrive; – it was like the disclosure of a wasting sore, useless and disgusting unless when shown to a surgeon, and for the purpose of cure. Yet, though the account rendered by the minister of the finances, while it passed from the hand of one idler to another, and occupied on sofas and toilettes the place of the latest novel, did doubtless engage giddy heads in vain and dangerous speculation, something was to be risked in order to pave the way of regaining for the French subjects the right most essential to freemen, that of granting or refusing their own supplies. The publicity of the distressed state of the finances, induced a general conviction that the oppressive system of taxation could only be removed, and that approaching bankruptcy, which was a still greater evil, avoided,

by resorting to the nation itself, convoked in their ancient form of representation, which was called the States-General.

It was true that, through length of time, the nature and powers of this body were forgotten, if indeed they had ever been very thoroughly fixed: and it was also true, that the constitution of the States-General of 1614, which was the last date of their being assembled, was not likely to suit a period when the country was so much changed, both in character and circumstances. The doubts concerning the composition of the medicine, and its probable effects, seldom abate the patient's confidence. All joined in desiring the convocation of this representative body, and all expected that such an assembly would be able to find some satisfactory remedy for the pressing evils of the state. The cry was general, and, as usual in such cases, few who joined in it knew exactly what it was they wanted.

TIERS ETAT.

Looking back on the period of 1780, with the advantage of our own experience, it is possible to see a chance, though perhaps a doubtful one, of avoiding the universal shipwreck which was fated to ensue. If the royal government, determining to gratify the general wish, had taken the initiative in conceding the great national measure as a boon flowing from the prince's pure good-will and love of his subjects, and if measures had been taken rapidly and decisively to secure seats in these bodies, but particularly in the Tiers Etat, to men known for their moderation and adherence to the monarchy, it seems probable that the crown

might have secured such an interest, in a body of its own creation, as would have silenced the attempts of any heated spirits to hurry the kingdom into absolute revolution. The reverence paid to the throne for so many centuries, had yet all the influence of unassailed sanctity; the king was still the master of an army, commanded under him by his nobles, and as yet animated by the spirit of loyalty, which is the natural attribute of the military profession; the minds of men were not warmed at once, and wearied, by a fruitless and chicaning delay, which only showed the extreme indisposition of the court to grant what they had no means of ultimately refusing; nor had public opinion yet been agitated by the bold discussions of a thousand pamphleteers, who, under pretence of enlightening the people, prepossessed their minds with the most extreme ideas of the popular character of the representation of the Tiers Etat, and its superiority over every other power of the state. Ambitious and unscrupulous men would then hardly have had the time or boldness to form those audacious pretensions which their ancestors dreamed not of, and which the course of six or seven years of protracted expectation, and successive renewals of hope, succeeded by disappointment, enabled them to mature.

Such a fatal interval, however, was suffered to intervene, between the first idea of convoking the States-General, and the period when that measure became inevitable. Without this delay, the king, invested with all his royal prerogatives, and at the head of the military force, might have surrendered with a good grace

such parts of his power as were inconsistent with the liberal opinions of the time, and such surrender must have been received as a grace, since it could not have been exacted as a sacrifice. The conduct of the government, in the interim, towards the nation whose representatives it was shortly to meet, resembled that of an insane person, who should by a hundred teasing and vexatious insults irritate into frenzy the lion, whose cage he was about to open, and to whose fury he must necessarily be exposed.

STATE OF THE REVENUE.

Necker, whose undoubted honesty, as well as his republican candour, had rendered him highly popular, had, under the influence of the old intriguer Maurepas, been dismissed from his office as minister of finance, in 1781. The witty, versatile, selfish, and cunning Maurepas, had the art to hold his power till the last moment of his long life, and died at the moment when the knell of death was a summons to call him from impending ruin.⁴⁸ He made, according to an expressive northern proverb, the "day and way alike long;" and died just about the period when the system of evasion and palliation, of usurious loans and lavish bounties, could scarce have served longer to save him from disgrace. Vergennes,⁴⁹ who succeeded him, was, like

⁴⁸ Maurepas was born in 1701. "At the age of eighty, he presented to the world the ridiculous spectacle of caducity affecting the frivolity of youth, and employed that time in penning a sonnet which would more properly have been devoted to correcting a despatch, or preparing an armament." He died in 1781. – See Lacretelle, tom. v., p. 8.

⁴⁹ The Count de Vergennes was born at Dijon in 1717. He died in 1787, greatly

himself, a courtier rather than a statesman; more studious to preserve his own power, by continuing the same system of partial expedients and temporary shifts, than willing to hazard the king's favour, or the popularity of his administration, by attempting any scheme of permanent utility or general reformation. Calonne,⁵⁰ the minister of finance, who had succeeded to that office after the brief administrations of Fleury and d'Ormesson, called on by his duty to the most difficult and embarrassing branch of government, was possessed of a more comprehensive genius, and more determined courage, than his principal Vergennes. So early as the year 1784, the deficiency betwixt the receipts of the whole revenues of the state, and the expenditure, extended to six hundred and eighty-four millions of livres, in British money about equal to twenty-eight millions four hundred thousand pounds sterling; but then a certain large portion of this debt consisted in annuities granted by government, which were annually in the train of being extinguished by the death of the holders; and there was ample room for saving, in the mode of collecting the various taxes. So that large as the sum of deficit appeared, it could not have been very formidable, considering the resources of so rich a country; but it was necessary, that the pressure of new burdens, to be imposed at this exigence, should be equally divided amongst the orders of the state. The Third

regretted by Louis, who was impressed by the conviction that, had his life been prolonged, the Revolution would not have taken place.

⁵⁰ Calonne was born at Douay in 1734. After being an exile in England, and other parts of Europe, he died at Paris in 1802.

Estate, or Commons, had been exhausted under the weight of taxes, which fell upon them alone, and Calonne formed the bold and laudable design of compelling the clergy and nobles, hitherto exempted from taxation, to contribute their share to the revenues of the state.

This, however, was, in the present state of the public, too bold a scheme to be carried into execution without the support of something resembling a popular representation. At this crisis, again might Louis have summoned the States-General, with some chance of uniting their suffrages with the wishes of the Crown. The King would have found himself in a natural alliance with the Commons, in a plan to abridge those immunities, which the Clergy and Nobles possessed, to the prejudice of The Third Estate. He would thus, in the outset at least, have united the influence and interests of the Crown with those of the popular party, and established something like a balance in the representative body, in which the Throne must have had considerable weight.

Apparently, Calonne and his principal Vergennes were afraid to take this manly and direct course, as indeed the ministers of an arbitrary monarch can rarely be supposed willing to call in the aid of a body of popular representatives. The ministers endeavoured, therefore, to supply the want of a body like the States-General, by summoning together an assembly of what was termed the Notables, or principal persons in the kingdom.

This was in every sense an unadvised measure.⁵¹ With something resembling the form of a great national council, the Notables had no right to represent the nation, neither did it come within their province to pass any resolution whatever. Their post was merely that of an extraordinary body of counsellors, who deliberated on any subject which the King might submit to their consideration, and were to express their opinion in answer to the Sovereign's interrogatories; but an assembly, which could only start opinions and debate upon them, without coming to any effective or potential decision, was a fatal resource at a crisis when decision was peremptorily necessary, and when all vague and irrelevant discussion was, as at a moment of national fermentation, to be cautiously avoided. Above all, there was this great error in having recourse to the Assembly of the Notables, that, consisting entirely of the privileged orders, the council was composed of the individuals most inimical to the equality of taxes, and most tenacious of those very immunities which were struck at by the scheme of the minister of finance.

Calonne found himself opposed at every point and received from the Notables remonstrances instead of support and countenance. That Assembly censuring all his plans, and rejecting his proposals, he was in their presence like a rash necromancer, who has been indeed able to raise a demon, but is unequal to the task of guiding him when evoked. He was further

⁵¹ They were summoned on 29th December, 1786, and met on 22d February of the subsequent year. – S.

weakened by the death of Vergennes, and finally obliged to resign his place and his country, a sacrifice at once to court intrigue and popular odium. Had this able but rash minister convoked the States-General instead of the Notables, he would have been at least sure of the support of the Third Estate, or Commons, and, allied with them, might have carried through so popular a scheme, as that which went to establish taxation upon a just and equal principle, affecting the rich as well as the poor, the proud prelate and wealthy noble, as well as the industrious cultivator of the soil.

Calonne having retired to England from popular hatred, his perilous office devolved upon the Archbishop of Sens, afterwards the Cardinal de Loménie,⁵² who was raised to the painful pre-eminence [May] by the interest of the unfortunate Marie Antoinette, whose excellent qualities were connected with a spirit of state-intrigue, proper to the sex in such elevated situations, which but too frequently thwarted or bore down the more candid intentions of her husband, and tended, though on her part unwittingly, to give his public measures, sometimes adopted on his own principles, and sometimes influenced by her intrigues and solicitations, an appearance of vacillation, and even of duplicity, which greatly injured them both in the public opinion. The new minister finding it as difficult to deal with

⁵² M. Loménie de Brienne was born at Paris in 1727. On being appointed Prime Minister, he was made Archbishop of Sens, and on retiring from office, in 1788, he obtained a cardinal's hat. He died in prison in 1794.

the Assembly of Notables as his predecessor, the King finally dissolved that body, without having received from them either the countenance or good counsel which had been expected; thus realizing the opinion expressed by Voltaire concerning such convocations:

"De tous ces Etats l'effet le plus commun,
Est de voir tous nos maux, sans en soulager un."⁵³

BED OF JUSTICE.

After dismissal of the Notables, the minister adopted or recommended a line of conduct so fluctuating and indecisive, so violent at one time in support of the royal prerogative, and so pusillanimous when he encountered resistance from the newly-awakened spirit of liberty, that had he been bribed to render the crown at once odious and contemptible, or to engage his master in a line of conduct which should irritate the courageous, and encourage the timid, among his dissatisfied subjects, the Archbishop of Sens could hardly, after the deepest thought, have adopted measures better adapted for such a purpose. As if determined to bring matters to an issue betwixt the King and the Parliament of Paris, he laid before the latter two new edicts for taxes,⁵⁴ similar in most respects to those which had been recommended by his predecessor Calonne to the Notables.

⁵³ Such Convocations all our ills descry, And promise much, but no true cure apply.

⁵⁴ Viz., One on timber, and one on territorial possessions. – See Thiers, vol. i., p. 14.

The Parliament refused to register these edicts, being the course which the minister ought to have expected. He then resolved upon a display of the royal prerogative in its most arbitrary and obnoxious form. A Bed of Justice,⁵⁵ as it was termed, was held, [Aug. 6,] where the King, presiding in person over the Court of Parliament, commanded the edicts imposing certain new taxes to be registered in his own presence; thus, by an act of authority emanating directly from the Sovereign, beating down the only species of opposition which the subjects, through any organ whatever, could offer to the increase of taxation.

The Parliament yielded the semblance of a momentary obedience, but protested solemnly, that the edict having been registered solely by the royal command, and against their unanimous opinion, should not have the force of a law. They remonstrated also to the Throne in terms of great freedom and energy, distinctly intimating, that they could not and would not be the passive instruments, through the medium of whom the public was to be loaded with new impositions; and they expressed, for the first time, in direct terms, the proposition, fraught with the fate of France, that neither the edicts of the King, nor the registration of those edicts by the Parliament, were sufficient to impose permanent burdens on the people; but such taxation was competent to the States-General only.⁵⁶

⁵⁵ "Lit de Justice" – the throne upon which the King was seated when he went to the Parliament.

⁵⁶ Mignet, *Hist. de la Rev. Française*, tom. i., p. 21.

In punishment of their undaunted defence of the popular cause, the Parliament was banished to Troyes; the government thus increasing the national discontent by the removal of the principal court of the kingdom, and by all the evils incident to a delay of public justice. The Provincial Parliaments supported the principles adopted by their brethren of Paris. The Chamber of Accounts, and the Court of Aids, the judicial establishments next in rank to that of the Parliament, also remonstrated against the taxes, and refused to enforce them. They were not enforced accordingly; and thus, for the first time, during two centuries at least, the royal authority of France being brought into direct collision with public opinion and resistance, was, by the energy of the subject, compelled to retrograde and yield ground. This was the first direct and immediate movement of that mighty Revolution, which afterwards rushed to its crisis like a rock rolling down a mountain. This was the first torch which was actually applied to the various combustibles which lay scattered through France, and which we have endeavoured to analyze. The flame soon spread into the provinces. The nobles of Brittany broke out into a kind of insurrection; the Parliament of Grenoble impugned, by a solemn decree, the legality of *lettres de cachet*. Strange and alarming fears, – wild and boundless hopes, – inconsistent rumours, – a vague expectation of impending events, – all contributed to agitate the public mind. The quick and mercurial tempers which chiefly distinguish the nation, were half maddened with suspense, while even the dull nature of the lowest

and most degraded of the community felt the coming impulse of extraordinary changes, as cattle are observed to be disturbed before an approaching thunder-storm.

The minister could not sustain his courage in such a menacing conjuncture, yet unhappily attempted a show of resistance, instead of leaving the King to the influence of his own sound sense and excellent disposition, which always induced him to choose the means of conciliation. There was indeed but one choice, and it lay betwixt civil war or concession. A despot would have adopted the former course, and, withdrawing from Paris, would have gathered around him the army still his own. A patriotic monarch – and such was Louis XVI. when exercising his own judgment – would have chosen the road of concession; yet his steps, even in retreating, would have been so firm, and his attitude so manly, that the people would not have ventured to ascribe to fear what flowed solely from a spirit of conciliation. But the conduct of the minister, or of those who directed his motions, was an alternation of irritating opposition to the public voice, and of ill-timed submission to its demands, which implied an understanding impaired by the perils of the conjuncture, and unequal alike to the task of avoiding them by concession, or resisting them with courage.

The King, indeed, recalled the Parliament of Paris from their exile, coming, at the same time, under an express engagement to convoke the States-General, and leading the subjects, of course, to suppose that the new imposts were to be left to their

consideration. But, as if to irritate men's minds, by showing a desire to elude the execution of what had been promised, the minister ventured, in an evil hour, to hazard another experiment upon the firmness of their nerves, and again to commit the dignity of the sovereign by bringing him personally to issue a command, which experience had shown the Parliament were previously resolved to disobey. By this new proceeding, the King was induced to hold what was called a Royal Sitting of the Parliament, which resembled in all its forms a Bed of Justice, except that it seems as if the commands of the monarch were esteemed less authoritative when so issued, than when they were, as on the former occasion, delivered in this last obnoxious assembly.

Thus, at less advantage than before, and, at all events, after the total failure of a former experiment, the King, arrayed in all the forms of his royalty, once more, and for the last time, convoked his Parliament in person; and again with his own voice commanded the court to register a royal edict for a loan of four hundred and twenty millions of francs, to be raised in the course of five years. This demand gave occasion to a debate which lasted nine hours, and was only closed by the King rising up, and issuing at length his positive and imperative orders that the loan should be registered. To the astonishment of the meeting, the first prince of the blood, the Duke of Orleans, arose, as if in reply, and demanded to know if they were assembled in a Bed of Justice or a Royal Sitting; and receiving for answer that the latter was

the quality of the meeting, he entered a solemn protest against the proceedings. [Nov. 19.] Thus was the authority of the King once more brought in direct opposition to the assertors of the rights of the people, as if on purpose to show, in the face of the whole nation, that its terrors were only those of a phantom, whose shadowy bulk might overawe the timid, but could offer no real cause of fear when courageously opposed.

The minister did not, however, give way without such an ineffectual struggle, as at once showed the weakness of the royal authority, and the willingness to wield it with the despotic sway of former times. Two members of the Parliament of Paris⁵⁷ were imprisoned in remote fortresses, and the Duke of Orleans was sent in exile to his estate.

A long and animated exchange of remonstrances followed betwixt the King and the Parliament, in which the former acknowledged his weakness, even by entering into the discussion of his prerogative; as well as by the concessions he found himself obliged to tender. Meantime, the Archbishop of Sens nourished the romantic idea of getting rid of these refractory courts entirely, and at the same time to evade the convocation of the States-General, substituting in their place the erection of a *Cour-plénière*, or ancient Feudal Court, composed of princes, peers, marshals of France, deputies from the provinces, and other distinguished persons, who should in future exercise all the

⁵⁷ Freteau and Sabatier. They were banished to the Hières. In 1794, Freteau was sent to the guillotine by Robespierre.

higher and nobler duties of the Parliaments, thus reduced to their original and proper duties as courts of justice.⁵⁸ But a court, or council of the ancient feudal times, with so slight an infusion of popular representation, could in no shape have accorded with the ideas which now generally prevailed; and so much was this felt to be the case, that many of the peers, and other persons nominated members of the *Cour-plénière*, declined the seats proposed to them, and the whole plan fell to the ground.

RIOTS AND INSURRECTIONS.

Meantime, violence succeeded to violence, and remonstrance to remonstrance. The Parliament of Paris, and all the provincial bodies of the same description, being suspended from their functions, and the course of regular justice of course interrupted, the spirit of revolt became general through the realm, and broke out in riots and insurrections of a formidable description; while, at the same time, the inhabitants of the capital were observed to become dreadfully agitated.

There wanted not writers to fan the rising discontent; and, what seems more singular, they were permitted to do so without interruption, notwithstanding the deepened jealousy with which free discussion was now regarded in France. Libels and satires of every description were publicly circulated, without an attempt on the part of the government to suppress the publications, or to punish their authors, although the most scandalous attacks on

⁵⁸ Mignet, tom. i., p. 22; Thiers, tom. i., p. 19.

the royal family, and on the queen in particular, were dispersed along with these political effusions. It seemed as if the arm of power was paralyzed, and the bonds of authority which had so long fettered the French people were falling asunder of themselves; for the liberty of the press, so long unknown was now openly assumed and exercised, without the government daring to interfere.⁵⁹

To conclude the picture, as if God and man had alike determined the fall of this ancient monarchy, a hurricane of most portentous and unusual character burst on the kingdom, and laying waste the promised harvest far and wide, showed to the terrified inhabitants the prospect at once of poverty and famine, added to those of national bankruptcy and a distracted government.⁶⁰

The latter evils seemed fast advancing; for the state of the finances became so utterly desperate, that Louis was under the necessity of stopping a large proportion of the treasury payments, and issuing bills for the deficiency. At this awful crisis, fearing for the King, and more for himself, the Archbishop of Sens retired from administration,⁶¹ and left the monarch, while bankruptcy and famine threatened the kingdom, to manage as he might, amid the storms which the measures of the minister himself had

⁵⁹ De Staël, tom. i., p. 169.

⁶⁰ Thiers, tom. i., p. 37.

⁶¹ 25th August, 1788. The archbishop fled to Italy with great expedition, after he had given in his resignation to his unfortunate sovereign. – See *ante*, p. 50. – S.

provoked to the uttermost.

STATES-GENERAL CONVOKED.

A new premier, and a total alteration of measures were to be resorted to, while Necker, the popular favourite, called to the helm of the state, regretted, with bitter anticipation of misfortune, the time which had been worse than wasted under the rule of the archbishop, who had employed it in augmenting the enemies and diminishing the resources of the crown, and forcing the King on such measures as caused the royal authority to be generally regarded as the common enemy of all ranks of the kingdom.⁶² To redeem the royal pledge by convoking the States-General, seemed to Necker the most fair as well as most politic proceeding; and indeed this afforded the only chance of once more reconciling the prince with the people, though it was now yielding that to a demand, which two years before would have been received as a boon.

We have already observed that the constitution of this assembly of national representatives was little understood, though the phrase was in the mouth of every one. It was to be the panacea to the disorders of the nation, yet men knew imperfectly the mode of composing this universal medicine, or the manner of its operation. Or rather, the people of France invoked the assistance of this national council, as they would have

⁶² When Necker received the intimation of his recall, his first words were, "Ah! why did they not give me those fifteen months of the Archbishop of Sens? Now it is too late." – De Staël, vol. i., p. 157.

done that of a tutelary angel, with full confidence in his power and benevolence, though they neither knew the form in which he might appear, nor the nature of the miracles which he was to perform in their behalf. It has been strongly objected to Necker, that he neglected, on the part of the crown, to take the initiative-line of conduct on this important occasion, and it has been urged that it was the minister's duty, without making any question or permitting any doubt, to assume that mode of convening the states, and regulating them when assembled, which should best tend to secure the tottering influence of his master. But Necker probably thought the time was past in which this power might have been assumed by the crown without exciting jealousy or opposition. The royal authority, he might recollect, had been of late years repeatedly strained, until it had repeatedly given way, and the issue, first of the Bed of Justice, and then of the Royal Sitting, was sufficient to show that words of authority would be wasted in vain upon disobedient ears, and might only excite a resistance which would prove its own lack of power. It was, therefore, advisable not to trust to the unaided exercise of prerogative, but to strengthen instead the regulations which might be adopted for the constitution of the States-General, by the approbation of some public body independent of the King and his ministers. And with this purpose, Necker convened a second meeting of the Notables, [November,] and laid before them, for their consideration, his plan for the constitution of the States-General.

There were two great points submitted to this body, concerning the constitution of the States-General. I. In what proportion the deputies of the Three Estates should be represented? II. Whether, when assembled, the Nobles, Clergy, and Third Estate, or Commons, should act separately as distinct chambers, or sit and vote as one united body?

THE TIERS ETAT.

Necker, a minister of an honest and candid disposition, a republican also, and therefore on principle a respecer of public opinion, unhappily did not recollect, that to be well-formed and accurate, public opinion should be founded on the authority of men of talents and integrity; and that the popular mind must be pre-occupied by arguments of a sound and virtuous tendency, else the enemy will sow tares, and the public will receive it in the absence of more wholesome grain. Perhaps, also, this minister found himself less in his element when treating of state affairs, than while acting in his proper capacity as a financier. However that may be, Necker's conduct resembled that of an unresolved general, who directs his movements by the report of a council of war. He did not sufficiently perceive the necessity that the measures to be taken should originate with himself rather than arise from the suggestion of others, and did not, therefore, avail himself of his situation and high popularity, to recommend such general preliminary arrangements as might preserve the influence of the crown in the States-General, without encroaching on the rights of

the subject. The silence of Necker leaving all in doubt, and open to discussion, those arguments had most weight with the public which ascribed most importance to the Third Estate. The talents of the Nobles and Clergy might be considered as having been already in vain appealed to in the two sessions of the Notables, an assembly composed chiefly out of the privileged classes, and whose advice and opinion had been given without producing any corresponding good effect. The Parliament had declared themselves incompetent to the measures necessary for the exigencies of the kingdom. The course adopted by the King indicated doubt and uncertainty, if not incapacity. The Tiers Etat, therefore, was the body of counsellors to whom the nation looked at this critical conjuncture.

"What is the Tiers Etat?" formed the title of a pamphlet by the Abbé Siêyes; and the answer returned by the author was such as augmented all the magnificent ideas already floating in men's minds concerning the importance of this order. "The Tiers Etat," said he, "comprehends the whole nation of France, excepting only the nobles and clergy." This view of the matter was so far successful, that the Notables recommended that the Commons, or Third Estate, should have a body of representatives equal to those of the nobles and the clergy united, and should thus form, in point of relative numbers, the moiety of the whole delegates.

This, however, would have been comparatively of small importance, had it been determined that the three estates were to sit, deliberate, and vote, not as a united body, but in three several

chambers.

Necker conceded to the Tiers Etat the right of double representation, but seemed prepared to maintain the ancient order of debating and voting by separate chambers. The crown had been already worsted by the rising spirit of the country in every attempt which it had made to stand through its own unassisted strength; and torn as the bodies of the clergy and nobles were by internal dissensions, and weakened by the degree of popular odium with which they were loaded, it would have required an artful consolidation of their force, and an intimate union betwixt them and the crown, to maintain a balance against the popular claims of the Commons, likely to be at once so boldly urged by themselves, and so favourably viewed by the nation. All this was, however, left, in a great measure, to accident, while every chance was against its being arranged in the way most advantageous to the monarchy.

The minister ought also in policy to have paved the way, for securing a party in the Third Estate itself, which should bear some character of royalism. This might doubtless have been done by the usual ministerial arts of influencing elections, or gaining over to the crown-interests some of the many men of talents, who, determined to raise themselves in this new world, had not yet settled to which side they were to give their support. But Necker, less acquainted with men than with mathematics, imagined that every member had intelligence enough to see the measures best calculated for the public good, and virtue enough

to follow them faithfully and exclusively. It was in vain that the Marquis de Bouillé⁶³ pointed out the dangers arising from the constitution assigned to the States-General, and insisted that the minister was arming the popular part of the nation against the two privileged orders, and that the latter would soon experience the effects of their hatred, animated by self-interest and vanity, the most active passions of mankind. Necker calmly replied, that there was a necessary reliance to be placed on the virtues of the human heart; – the maxim of a worthy man, but not of an enlightened statesman,⁶⁴ who has but too much reason to know how often both the virtues and the prudence of human nature are surmounted by its prejudices and passions.⁶⁵

It was in this state of doubt, and total want of preparation, that the King was to meet the representatives of the people, whose elections had been trusted entirely to chance, without even an attempt to influence them in favour of the most eligible persons. Yet surely the crown, hitherto almost the sole acknowledged

⁶³ De Bouillé was a native of Auvergne, and a relative of La Fayette. He died in London, in 1800.

⁶⁴ See Mémoires de Bouillé. Madame de Staël herself admits this deficiency in the character of a father, of whom she was justly proud. – "Se fiant trop il faut l'avouer, à l'empire de la raison." – S. – ("Confiding, it must be admitted, too much in the power of reason.") —*Rev. Franç.*, tom. i., p. 171.

⁶⁵ "The concessions of Necker were the work of a man ignorant of the first principles of the government of mankind. It was he who overturned the monarchy, and brought Louis XVI. to the scaffold. Marat, Danton, Robespierre himself, did less mischief to France: he brought on the Revolution, which they consummated." – Napoleon, as reported by *Bourrienne*, tom. viii., p. 108.

authority in France, should have been provided with supporters in the new authority which was to be assembled. At least the minister might have been prepared with some system or plan of proceeding, upon which this most important convention was to conduct its deliberations; but there was not even an attempt to take up the reins which were floating on the necks of those who were for the first time harnessed to the chariot of the state. All was expectation, mere vague and unauthorised hope, that in this multitude of counsellors there would be found safety.⁶⁶

Hitherto we have described the silent and smooth, but swift and powerful, stream of innovation, as it rolled on to the edge of the sheer precipice. We are now to view the precipitate tumult and terrors of the cataract.

⁶⁶ A *calembourg* of the period presaged a different result. – "So numerous a concourse of state-physicians assembled to consult for the weal of the nation, argued," it was said, "the imminent danger and approaching death of the patient." – S.

CHAPTER IV

Meeting of the States-General – Predominant Influence of the Tiers Etat – Property not represented sufficiently in that Body – General character of the Members – Disposition of the Estate of the Nobles – And of the Clergy – Plan of forming the Three Estates into two Houses – Its advantages – It fails – The Clergy unite with the Tiers Etat, which assumes the title of the National Assembly – They assume the task of Legislation, and declare all former Fiscal Regulations illegal – They assert their determination to continue their Sessions – Royal Sitting – Terminates in the Triumph of the Assembly – Parties in that Body – Mounier – Constitutionalists – Republicans – Jacobins – Orleans.

INFLUENCE OF THE TIERS ETAT.

The Estates-General of France met at Versailles on the 5th May, 1789, and that was indisputably the first day of the Revolution. The Abbé Siêyes, in a pamphlet which we have mentioned, had already asked, "What was the Third Estate? – It was *the whole nation*. What had it been hitherto in a political light? – Nothing. What was it about to become presently? – Something." Had the last answer been *Every thing*, it would have been nearer the truth; for it soon appeared that this Third Estate, which, in the year 1614, the Nobles had refused to acknowledge

even as a younger brother⁶⁷ of their order, was now, like the rod of the prophet, to swallow up all those who affected to share its power. Even amid the pageantry with which the ceremonial of the first sitting abounded, it was clearly visible that the wishes, hopes, and interest of the public, were exclusively fixed upon the representatives of the Commons. The rich garments and floating plumes of the Nobility, and the reverend robes of the Clergy, had nothing to fix the public eye; their sounding and emphatic titles had nothing to win the ear; the recollection of the high feats of the one, and long sanctified characters of the other order, had nothing to influence the mind of the spectators. All eyes were turned on the members of the Third Estate, in a plebeian and humble costume, corresponding to their lowly birth and occupation, as the only portion of the assembly from whom they looked for the lights and the counsels which the time demanded.⁶⁸

It would be absurd to assert, that the body which thus

⁶⁷ The Baron de Senneci, when the estates of the kingdom were compared to three brethren, of which the Tiers Etat was youngest, declared that the Commons of France had no title to arrogate such a relationship with the nobles, to whom they were so far inferior in blood, and in estimation.

⁶⁸ Madame de Staël, and Madame de Montmorin, wife of the Minister for Foreign Affairs, beheld from a gallery the spectacle. The former exulted in the boundless prospect of national felicity which seemed to be opening under the auspices of her father. "You are wrong to rejoice," said Madame de Montmorin; "this event forebodes much misery to France and to ourselves." Her presentiment was but too well founded. She herself perished on the scaffold with one of her sons; her husband was murdered on September 2d; her eldest daughter died in the hospital of a prison, and her youngest died of a broken heart. — See M. de Staël, vol. i., p. 187.

engrossed the national attention was devoid of talents to deserve it. On the contrary, the Tiers Etat contained a large proportion of the learning, the intelligence, and the eloquence of the kingdom; but unhappily it was composed of men of theory rather than of practice, men more prepared to change than to preserve or repair; and, above all, of men, who, generally speaking, were not directly concerned in the preservation of peace and order, by possessing a large property in the country.

The due proportion in which talents and property are represented in the British House of Commons, is perhaps the best assurance for the stability of the constitution. Men of talents, bold, enterprising, eager for distinction, and ambitious of power, suffer no opportunity to escape of recommending such measures as may improve the general system, and raise to distinction those by whom they are proposed; while men of substance, desirous of preserving the property which they possess, are scrupulous in scrutinizing every new measure, and steady in rejecting such as are not accompanied with the most certain prospect of advantage to the state. Talent, eager and active, desires the means of employment; Property, cautious, doubtful, jealous of innovation, acts as a regulator rather than an impulse on the machine, by preventing its either moving too rapidly, or changing too suddenly. The over-caution of those by whom property is represented, may sometimes, indeed, delay a projected improvement, but much more frequently impedes a rash and hazardous experiment. Looking back on the

Parliamentary history of two centuries, it is easy to see how much practical wisdom has been derived from the influence exercised by those members called Country Gentlemen, who, unambitious of distinguishing themselves by their eloquence, and undesirous of mingling in the ordinary debates of the house, make their sound and unsophisticated good sense heard and understood upon every crisis of importance, in a manner alike respected by the Ministry and the opposition of the day, – by the professed statesmen of the house, whose daily business is legislation, and whose thoughts, in some instances, are devoted to public affairs, because they have none of their own much worth looking after. In this great and most important characteristic of representation, the Tiers Etat of France was necessarily deficient; in fact, the part of the French constitution, which, without exactly corresponding to the country gentlemen of England, most nearly resembled them, was a proportion of the Rural Noblesse of France, who were represented amongst the Estate of the Nobility. An edict, detaching these rural proprietors, and perhaps the inferior clergy, from their proper orders, and including their representatives in that of the Tiers Etat, would have infused into the latter assembly a proportional regard for the rights of landholders, whether lay or clerical; and as they must have had a voice in those anatomical experiments, of which their property was about to become the subject, it may be supposed they would have resisted the application of the scalpel, excepting when it was unavoidably necessary. Instead of which, both the Nobles and Clergy came

soon to be placed on the anatomical table at the mercy of each state-quack, who, having no interest in their sufferings, thought them excellent subjects on which to exemplify some favourite hypothesis.

While owners of extensive landed property were in a great measure excluded from the representation of the Third Estate, its ranks were filled from those classes which seek novelties in theory, and which are in the habit of profiting by them in practice. There were professed men of letters called thither, as they hoped and expected, to realize theories, for the greater part inconsistent with the present state of things, in which, to use one of their own choicest common-places, – "Mind had not yet acquired its due rank." There were many of the inferior branches of the law; for, unhappily, in this profession also the graver and more enlightened members were called by their rank to the Estate of the Noblesse. To these were united churchmen without livings, and physicians without patients; men, whose education generally makes them important in the humble society in which they move, and who are proportionally presumptuous and conceited of their own powers, when advanced into that which is superior to their usual walk. There were many bankers also, speculators in politics, as in their natural employment of stock-jobbing; and there were intermingled with the classes we have noticed some individual nobles, expelled from their own ranks for want of character, who, like the dissolute Mirabeau, a moral monster for talents and want of principle, menaced,

from the station which they had assumed, the rights of the order from which they had been expelled, and, like deserters of every kind, were willing to guide the foes to whom they had fled, into the intrenchments of the friends whom they had forsaken, or by whom they had been exiled. There were also mixed with these perilous elements many individuals, not only endowed with talents and integrity, but possessing a respectable proportion of sound sense and judgment; but who, unfortunately, aided less to counteract the revolutionary tendency, than to justify it by argument or dignify it by example. From the very beginning, the Tiers Etat evinced a determined purpose to annihilate in consequence, if not in rank, the other two orders of the state, and to engross the whole power into their own hands.⁶⁹

VIEWS OF THE NOBLESSE.

It must be allowed to the Commons, that the Noblesse had possessed themselves of a paramount superiority over the middle class, totally inconsistent with the just degree of consideration due to their fellow-subjects, and irreconcilable with the spirit of enlightened times. They enjoyed many privileges which were humiliating to the rest of the nation, and others that were grossly unjust, among which must be reckoned their immunities from taxation. Assembled as an estate of the kingdom, they felt the *esprit-de-corps*, and, attached to the privileges of their order, showed little readiness to make the sacrifices which the times

⁶⁹ Lacretelle, tom. i., p. 32; Rivarol, p. 37.

demanded, though at the risk of having what they refused to grant, forcibly wrested from them. They were publicly and imprudently tenacious, when, both on principle and in policy, they should have been compliant and accommodating – for their own sake, as well as that of the sovereign. Yet let us be just to that gallant and unfortunate body of men. They possessed the courage, if not the skill or strength of their ancestors, and while we blame the violence with which they clung to useless and antiquated privileges, let us remember that these were a part of their inheritance, which no man renounces willingly, and no man of spirit yields up to threats. If they erred in not adopting from the beginning a spirit of conciliation and concession, no body of men ever suffered so cruelly for hesitating to obey a summons, which called them to acts of such unusual self-denial.

The Clergy were no less tenacious of the privileges of the Church, than the Noblesse of their peculiar feudal immunities. It had been already plainly intimated, that the property of the clerical orders ought to be subject, as well as all other species of property, to the exigencies of the state; and the philosophical opinions which had impugned their principles of faith, and rendered their persons ridiculous instead of reverend, would, it was to be feared, induce those by whom they were entertained, to extend their views to a general seizure of the whole, instead of a part, of the Church's wealth.

Both the first and second estates, therefore, kept aloof, moved by the manner in which the private interests of each stood

committed, and both endeavoured to avert the coming storm, by retarding the deliberations of the States-General. They were particularly desirous to secure their individual importance as distinct orders, and appealed to ancient practice and the usage of the year 1614, by which the three several estates sat and voted in three separate bodies. But the Tiers Etat, who, from the beginning, felt their own strength, were determined to choose that mode of procedure by which their force should be augmented and consolidated. The double representation had rendered them equal in numbers to both the other bodies, and as they were sure of some interest among the inferior Noblesse, and a very considerable party amongst the lower clergy, the assistance of these two minorities, added to their own numbers, must necessarily give them the superiority in every vote, providing the three chambers could be united into one.

On the other hand, the clergy and nobles saw that a union of this nature would place all their privileges and property at the mercy of the Commons, whom the union of the chambers in one assembly would invest with an overwhelming majority in that convocation. They had no reason to expect that this power, if once acquired, would be used with moderation, for not only had their actually obnoxious privileges been assailed by every battery of reason and of ridicule, but the records of former ages had been ransacked for ridiculous absurdities and detestable cruelties of the possessors of feudal power, all which were imputed to the present privileged classes, and mingled with many fictions

of unutterable horror, devised on purpose to give a yet darker colouring to the system which it was their object to destroy.⁷⁰ Every motive, therefore, of self-interest and self-preservation, induced the two first chambers, aware of the possession which the third had obtained over the public mind, to maintain, if possible, the specific individuality of their separate classes, and use the right hitherto supposed to be vested in them, of protecting their own interests by their own separate votes, as distinct bodies.

Others, with a deeper view, and on less selfish reasoning, saw much hazard in amalgamating the whole force of the state, saving that which remained in the crown, into one powerful body, subject to all the hasty impulses to which popular assemblies lie exposed, as lakes to the wind, and in placing the person and authority of the King in solitary and diametrical opposition to what must necessarily, in moments of enthusiasm, appear to be the will of the whole people. Such statesmen would have preferred retaining an intermediate check upon the popular counsels of the Tiers Etat by the other two chambers, which might, as in England, have been united into one, and would have presented an imposing front, both in point of wealth and property, and through the respect which, excepting under the influence of extraordinary emotion, the people, in spite of themselves, cannot help entertaining for birth and rank. Such a

⁷⁰ It was, for example, gravely stated, that a seigneur of a certain province possessed a feudal right to put two of his vassals to death upon his return from hunting, and to rip their bellies open, and plunge his feet into their entrails to warm them. – S.

body, providing the stormy temper of the times had admitted of its foundations being laid sufficiently strong, would have served as a breakwater betwixt the throne and the streamtide of popular opinion; and the monarch would have been spared the painful and perilous task of opposing himself personally, directly, and without screen or protection of any kind, to the democratical part of the constitution. Above all, by means of such an upper house, time would have been obtained for reviewing more coolly those measures, which might have passed hastily through the assembly of popular representatives. It is observed in the history of innovation, that the indirect and unforeseen consequences of every great change of an existing system, are more numerous and extensive than those which had been foreseen and calculated upon, whether by those who advocated, or those who opposed the alteration. The advantages of a constitution, in which each measure of legislation must necessarily be twice deliberately argued by separate senates, acting under different impressions, and interposing, at the same time, a salutary delay, during which heats may subside, and erroneous views be corrected, requires no further illustration.

INFLUENCE OF THE TIERS ETAT.

It must be owned, nevertheless, that there existed the greatest difficulty in any attempt which might have been made to give weight to the Nobles as a separate chamber. The community at large looked to reforms deeply affecting the immunities of the privileged classes, as the most obvious means for the regeneration

of the kingdom at large, and must have seen with jealousy an institution like an upper house, which placed the parties who were principally to suffer these changes in a condition to impede, or altogether prevent them. It was naturally to be expected, that the Clergy and Nobles, united in an upper house, must have become somewhat partial judges in the question of retrenching and limiting their own exclusive privileges; and, besides the ill-will which the Commons bore them as the possessors and assertors of rights infringing on the liberties of the people, it might be justly apprehended that, if the scourge destined for them were placed in their own hand, they might use it with the chary moderation of the squire in the romance of Cervantes.⁷¹ There would also have been reason to doubt that, when the nation was so much divided by factions, two houses, so different in character and composition, could hardly have been brought to act with firmness and liberality towards each other – that the one would have been ever scheming for the recovery of their full privileges, supposing they had been obliged to surrender a part of them, while the other would still look forward to the accomplishment of an entirely democratical revolution. In this way, the checks which ought to have acted merely to restrain the violence of either party, might operate as the means of oversetting the constitution which they were intended to preserve.

Still, it must be observed, that while the King retained any

⁷¹ See Don Quixote, part ii., chap. lxi., (vol. v., p. 296. Lond., 1822.)

portion of authority, he might, with the countenance of the supposed upper chamber, or senate, have balanced the progress of democracy. Difficult as the task might be, an attempt towards it ought to have been made. But, unhappily, the King's ear was successively occupied by two sets of advisers, one of whom counselled him to surrender every thing to the humour of the reformers of the state, while the other urged him to resist their most reasonable wishes; – without considering that he had to deal with those who had the power to take by force what was refused to petition. Mounier and Malouet advocated the establishment of two chambers in the Tiers Etat, and Necker was certainly favourable to some plan of the kind; but the Noblesse thought it called upon them for too great a sacrifice of their privileges, though it promised to ensure what remained, while the democratical part of the Tiers Etat opposed it obstinately, as tending to arrest the march of the revolutionary impulse.

Five or six weeks elapsed in useless debates concerning the form in which the estates should vote; during which period the Tiers Etat showed, by their boldness and decision, that they knew the advantage which they held, and were sensible that the other bodies, if they meant to retain the influence of their situation in any shape, must unite with them, on the principle according to which smaller drops of water are attracted by the larger. This came to pass accordingly. The Tiers Etat were joined by the whole body of inferior clergy, and by some of the nobles, and on 17th June, 1789, proceeded to constitute themselves a legislative

body, exclusively competent in itself to the entire province of legislation; and, renouncing the name of the Third Estate, which reminded men they were only one out of three bodies, they adopted⁷² that of the National Assembly, and avowed themselves not merely the third branch of the representative body, but the sole representatives of the people of France, nay, the people themselves, wielding in person the whole gigantic powers of the realm. They now claimed the character of a supreme body, no longer limited to the task of merely requiring a redress of grievances, for which they had been originally appointed, but warranted to destroy and rebuild whatever they thought proper in the constitution of the state. It is not easy, on any ordinary principle, to see how a representation, convoked for a certain purpose, and with certain limited powers, should thus essentially alter their own character, and set themselves in such a different relation to the crown and the nation, from that to which their commissions restricted them; but the National Assembly were well aware, that, in extending their powers far beyond the terms of these commissions, they only fulfilled the wishes of their constituents, and that, in assuming to themselves so ample an authority, they would be supported by the whole nation, excepting the privileged orders.

The National Assembly proceeded to exercise their power with the same audacity which they had shown in assuming it. They passed a sweeping decree, by which they declared

⁷² "By a majority of 491 to 90." – Lacretelle.

all the existing taxes to be illegal impositions, the collection of which they sanctioned only for the present, and as an interim arrangement, until they should have time to establish the financial regulations of the state upon an equal and permanent footing.⁷³

ROYAL SITTING.

The King, acting under the advice of Necker, and fulfilling the promise made on his part by the Archbishop of Sens, his former minister, had, as we have seen, assembled the States-General; but he was not prepared for the change of the Third Estate into the National Assembly, and for the pretensions which it asserted in the latter character. Terrified, and it was little wonder, at the sudden rise of this gigantic and all-overshadowing fabric, Louis became inclined to listen to those who counselled him to combat this new and formidable authority, by opposing to it the weight of royal power; to be exercised, however, with such attention to the newly-asserted popular opinions, and with such ample surrender of the obnoxious part of the royal prerogative, as might gratify the rising spirit of freedom. For this purpose a Royal Sitting was appointed, at which the King in person was to meet the three estates of his kingdom, and propose a scheme which, it was hoped, might unite all parties, and tranquillize all minds. The name and form of this *Séance Royale* was perhaps not well chosen, as being too nearly allied to those of a Bed of

⁷³ Lacretelle, tom. vii., p. 39.

Justice, in which the King was accustomed to exercise imperative authority over the Parliament; and the proceeding was calculated to awaken recollection of the highly unpopular Royal Sitting of the 19th November, 1787, the displacing of Necker, and the banishment of the Duke of Orleans.

But, as if this had not been sufficient, an unhappy accident, which almost resembled a fatality, deranged this project, destroyed all the grace which might, on the King's part, have attended the measure, and in place of it, threw upon the court the odium of having indirectly attempted the forcible dissolution of the Assembly, while it invested the members of that body with the popular character of steady patriots, whose union, courage, and presence of mind, had foiled the stroke of authority which had been aimed at their existence.

The hall of the Commons was fixed upon for the purposes of the Royal Sitting, as the largest of the three which were occupied by the three estates, and workmen were employed in making the necessary arrangements and alterations. These alterations were imprudently commenced, [June 20,] before holding any communication on the subject with the National Assembly; and it was simply notified to their president, Bailli, by the master of the royal ceremonies, that the King had suspended the meeting of the Assembly until the Royal Sitting should have taken place. Bailli, the president, well known afterwards by his tragical fate, refused to attend to an order so intimated, and the members of Assembly, upon resorting to their ordinary place of meeting, found it full of

workmen, and guarded by soldiers. This led to one of the most extraordinary scenes of the Revolution.

The representatives of the nation, thus expelled by armed guards from their proper place of assemblage, found refuge in a common Tennis-court, while a thunder-storm, emblem of the moral tempest which raged on the earth, poured down its terrors from the heavens. It was thus that, exposed to the inclemency of the weather, and with the wretched accommodations which such a place afforded, the members of Assembly took, and attested by their respective signatures, a solemn oath, "to continue their sittings until the constitution of the kingdom, and the regeneration of the public order, should be established on a solid basis."⁷⁴ The scene was of a kind to make the deepest impression both on the actors and the spectators; although, looking back at the distance of so many years, we are tempted to ask, at what period the National Assembly would have been dissolved, had they adhered literally to their celebrated oath? But the conduct of the government was, in every respect, worthy of censure. The probability of this extraordinary occurrence might easily have been foreseen. If mere want of consideration gave rise to it, the King's ministers were most culpably careless; if the closing of the hall, and suspending of the sittings of the Assembly, was intended by way of experiment upon its temper and patience, it was an act of madness equal to that of irritating an already exasperated lion. Be this, however, as it may, the conduct of

⁷⁴ Lacretelle, tom. vii., p. 41.

the court had the worst possible effect on the public mind, and prepared them to view with dislike and suspicion all propositions emanating from the throne; while the magnanimous firmness and unanimity of the Assembly seemed that of men determined to undergo martyrdom, rather than desert the assertion of their own rights, and those of the people.

At the Royal Sitting, which took place three days after the vow of the Tennis-Court, a plan was proposed by the King, offering such security for the liberty of the subject, as would, a year before, have been received with grateful rapture; but it was the unhappy fate of Louis XVI. neither to recede nor advance at the fortunate moment. Happy would it have been for him, for France, and for Europe, if the science of astrology, once so much respected, had in reality afforded the means of selecting lucky days. Few of his were marked with a white stone.

CONCESSIONS OF THE KING.

By the scheme which he proposed, the King renounced the power of taxation, and the right of borrowing money, except to a trifling extent, without assent of the States-General; he invited the Assembly to form a plan for regulating *lettres de cachet*, and acknowledged the personal freedom of the subject; he provided for the liberty of the press, but not without a recommendation that some check should be placed upon its license; and he remitted to the States, as the proper authority, the abolition of

the *gabelle*,⁷⁵ and other unequal or oppressive taxes.

But all these boons availed nothing, and seemed, to the people and their representatives, but a tardy and ungracious mode of resigning rights which the crown had long usurped, and only now restored when they were on the point of being wrested from its gripe. In addition to this, offence was taken at the tone and terms adopted in the royal address. The members of the Assembly conceived, that the expression of the royal will was brought forward in too imperative a form. They were offended that the King should have recommended the exclusion of spectators from the sittings of the Assembly; and much displeasure was occasioned by his declaring, thus late, their deliberations and decrees on the subject of taxes illegal. But the discontent was summed up and raised to the height by the concluding article of the royal address, in which, notwithstanding their late declarations, and oath not to break up their sittings until they had completed a constitution for France, the King presumed, by his own sole authority, to dissolve the estates.⁷⁶ To conclude, Necker, upon whom alone among the ministers the popular party reposed confidence, had absented himself from the Royal Sitting, and thereby intimated his discontent with the scheme proposed.⁷⁷

⁷⁵ The government monopoly of salt, under the name of the *gabelle*, was maintained over about two-thirds of the kingdom.

⁷⁶ Mignet, tom. i., p. 43.

⁷⁷ "The evening before, he had tendered his resignation, which was not accepted,

This plan of a constitutional reformation was received with great applause by the Clergy and the Nobles, while the Third Estate listened in sullen silence. They knew little of the human mind, who supposed that the display of prerogative, which had been so often successfully resisted, could influence such a body, or induce them to descend from the station of power which they had gained, and to render themselves ridiculous by rescinding the vow which they had so lately taken.

The King having, by his own proper authority, dissolved the Assembly, left the hall, followed by the Nobles and part of the Clergy; but the remaining members, hitherto silent and sullen, immediately resumed their sitting. The King, supposing him resolute to assert the prerogative which his own voice had but just claimed, had no alternative but that of expelling them by force, and thus supporting his order for dissolution of the Assembly; but, always halting between two opinions, Louis employed no rougher means of removing them than a gentle summons to disperse, intimated by the royal master of ceremonies. To this officer, not certainly the most formidable satellite of arbitrary power, Mirabeau replied with energetic determination, – "Slave! return to thy master, and tell him, that his bayonets alone can drive from their post the representatives of the people."

The Assembly then, on the motion of Camus, proceeded to pass a decree, that they adhered to their oath taken in the Tennis-

as the measures adopted by the court were not such as he thoroughly approved." – Lacretelle, tom. vii., p. 47.

court; while by another they declared, that their own persons were inviolable, and that whoever should attempt to execute any restraint or violence upon a representative of the people, should be thereby guilty of the crime of high treason against the nation.

Their firmness, joined to the inviolability with which they had invested themselves, and the commotions which had broken out at Paris, compelled the King to give way, and renounce his purpose of dissolving the states, which continued their sittings under their new title of the National Assembly; while at different intervals, and by different manœuvres, the Chambers of the Clergy and Nobles were united with them, or, more properly, were merged and absorbed in one general body. Had that Assembly been universally as pure in its intentions as we verily believe to have been the case with many or most of its members, the French government, now lying dead at their feet, might, like the clay of Prometheus, have received new animation from their hand.

But the National Assembly, though almost unanimous in resisting the authority of the crown, and in opposing the claims of the privileged classes, was much divided respecting ulterior views, and carried in its bosom the seeds of internal dissension, and the jarring elements of at least FOUR parties, which had afterwards their successive entrance and exit on the revolutionary stage; or rather, one followed the other like successive billows, each obliterating and destroying the marks its predecessor had left on the beach.

PARTIES OF THE ASSEMBLY.

The First and most practical division of these legislators, was the class headed by Mounier,⁷⁸ one of the wisest, as well as one of the best and worthiest men in France, – by Malouet,⁷⁹ and others. They were patrons of a scheme at which we have already hinted, and they thought France ought to look for some of the institutions favourable to freedom, to England, whose freedom had flourished so long. To transplant the British oak, with all its contorted branches and extended roots, would have been a fruitless attempt, but the infant tree of liberty might have been taught to grow after the same fashion. Modern France, like England of old, might have retained such of her own ancient laws, forms, or regulations, as still were regarded by the nation with any portion of respect, intermingling them with such additions and alterations as were required by the liberal spirit of modern times, and the whole might have been formed on the principles of British freedom. The nation might thus, in building its own bulwarks, have profited by the plan of those which had so long resisted the tempest. It is true, the French legislature could not have promised themselves, by the adoption of this course, to form at once a perfect and entire system; but they might

⁷⁸ Mounier was born at Grenoble in 1758. He quitted France in 1790, but returned in 1802. He afterwards became one of Napoleon's counsellors of state in 1806.

⁷⁹ Malouet was born at Riom in 1740. To escape the massacres of September, 1790, he fled to England; but returned to France in 1801, and, in 1810, was appointed one of Napoleon's counsellors of state. He died in 1814.

have secured the personal freedom of the subject, the trial by jury, the liberty of the press, and the right of granting or withholding the supplies necessary for conducting the state, – of itself the strongest of all guarantees for national freedom, and that of which, when once vested in their own representatives, the people will never permit them to be deprived. They might have adopted also other checks, balances, and controls, essential to the permanence of a free country; and having laid so strong a foundation, there would have been time to experience their use as well as their stability, and to introduce gradually such further improvements, additions, or alterations, as the state of France should appear to require, after experience of those which they had adopted.

But besides that the national spirit might be revolted, – not unnaturally, however unwisely, – at borrowing the essential peculiarities of their new constitution from a country which they were accustomed to consider as the natural rival of their own, there existed among the French a jealousy of the crown, and especially of the privileged classes, with whom they had been so lately engaged in political hostility, which disinclined the greater part of the Assembly to trust the King with much authority, or the nobles with that influence which any imitation of the English constitution must have assigned to them. A fear prevailed, that whatever privileges should be left to the King or nobles, would be so many means of attack furnished to them against the new system. Joined to this was the ambition of creating at once,

and by their own united wisdom, a constitution as perfect as the armed personification of wisdom in the heathen mythology. England had worked her way, from practical reformation of abuses, into the adoption of general maxims of government. It was reserved, thought most of the National Assembly, for France, to adopt a nobler and more intellectual course, and, by laying down abstract doctrines of public right, to deduce from these their rules of practical legislation; – just as it is said, that in the French naval yards their vessels are constructed upon the principles of abstract mathematics, while those in England are, or were, chiefly built upon the more technical and mechanical rules.⁸⁰ But it seems on this and other occasions to have escaped these acute reasoners, that beams and planks are subject to certain unalterable natural laws, while man is, by the various passions acting in his nature, in contradiction often to the suggestions of his understanding, as well as by the various modifications of society, liable to a thousand variations, all of which call for limitations and exceptions qualifying whatever general maxims may be adopted concerning his duties and his rights.

All such considerations were spurned by the numerous body of the new French legislature, who resolved, in imitation of Medea,

⁸⁰ "Abstract science will not enable a man to become a ship-wright. The French are perhaps the worst ship-wrights in all Europe, but they are confessedly among the first and best theorists in naval architecture, and it is one of those unaccountable phenomena in the history of man, that they never attempted to combine the two. Happily the English have hit upon that expedient." – Barrow.

to fling into their renovating kettle every existing joint and member of their old constitution, in order to its perfect and entire renovation. This mode of proceeding was liable to three great objections. *First*, That the practical inferences deduced from the abstract principle were always liable to challenge by those, who, in logical language, denied the minor of the proposition, or asserted that the conclusion was irregularly deduced from the premises. *Secondly*, That the legislators, thus grounding the whole basis of their intended constitution upon speculative political opinions, strongly resembled the tailors of Laputa, who, without condescending to take measure of their customers, like brethren of the trade elsewhere, took the girth and altitude of the person by mathematical calculation, and if the clothes did not fit, as was almost always the case, thought it ample consolation for the party concerned to be assured, that, as they worked from infallible rules of art, the error could only be occasioned by his own faulty and irregular conformation of figure. *Thirdly*, A legislature which contents itself with such a constitution as is adapted to the existing state of things, may hope to attain their end, and in presenting it to the people, may be entitled to say, that, although the plan is not perfect, it partakes in that but of the nature of all earthly institutions, while it comprehends the elements of as much good as the actual state of society permits; but from the lawmakers, who begin by destroying all existing enactments, and assume it as their duty entirely to renovate the constitution of a country, nothing short of absolute

perfection can be accepted. They can shelter themselves under no respect to ancient prejudices which they have contradicted, or to circumstances of society which they have thrown out of consideration. They must follow up to the uttermost the principle they have adopted, and their institutions can never be fixed or secure from the encroachments of succeeding innovators, while they retain any taint of that fallibility to which all human inventions are necessarily subject.

The majority of the French Assembly entertained, nevertheless, the ambitious view of making a constitution, corresponding in every respect to those propositions they had laid down as embracing the rights of man, which, if it should not happen to suit the condition of their country, would nevertheless be such as *ought* to have suited it, but for the irregular play of human passions, and the artificial habits acquired in an artificial state of society. But this majority differed among themselves in this essential particular, that the SECOND division of the legislature, holding that of Mounier for the first, was disposed to place at the head of their newly-manufactured government the reigning King, Louis XVI. This resolution in his favour might be partly out of regard to the long partiality of the nation to the House of Bourbon, partly out of respect for the philanthropical and accommodating character of Louis. We may conceive also, that La Fayette, bred a soldier, and Bailli, educated a magistrate, had still, notwithstanding their political creed, a natural though unphilosophical partiality to their well-meaning and ill-fated

sovereign, and a conscientious desire to relax, so far as his particular interest was concerned, their general rule of reversing all that had previously had a political existence in France.

REPUBLICANS.

A THIRD faction, entertaining the same articles of political creed with La Fayette, Bailli, and others, carried them much farther, and set at defiance the scruples which limited the two first parties in their career of reformation. These last agreed with La Fayette on the necessity of reconstructing the whole government upon a new basis, without which entire innovation, they further agreed with him, that it must have been perpetually liable to the chance of a counter-revolution. But carrying their arguments farther than the Constitutional party, as the followers of Fayette, these bolder theorists pleaded the inconsistency and danger of placing at the head of their new system of reformed and regenerated government, a prince accustomed to consider himself, as by inheritance, the legitimate possessor of absolute power. They urged that, like the snake and peasant in the fable, it was impossible that the monarch and his democratical counsellors could forget, the one the loss of his power, the other the constant temptation which must beset the King to attempt its recovery. With more consistency, therefore, than the Constitutionals, this third party of politicians became decided Republicans, determined upon obliterating from the new constitution every name and vestige of monarchy.

The men of letters in the Assembly were, many of them,

attached to this faction. They had originally been kept in the background by the lawyers and mercantile part of the Assembly. Many of them possessed great talents, and were by nature men of honour and of virtue. But in great revolutions, it is impossible to resist the dizzying effect of enthusiastic feeling and excited passion. In the violence of their zeal for the liberty of France, they too frequently adopted the maxim, that so glorious an object sanctioned almost any means which could be used to attain it. Under the exaggerated influence of a mistaken patriotism, they were too apt to forget that a crime remains the same in character, even when perpetrated in a public cause.⁸¹

It was among these ardent men that first arose the idea of forming a Club, or Society, to serve as a point of union for those who entertained the same political sentiments. Once

⁸¹ A singular instance of this overstrained and dangerous enthusiasm is given by Madame Roland. [Memoirs, part i., p. 144.] It being the purpose to rouse the fears and spirit of the people, and direct their animosity against the court party, Grangeneuve agreed that he himself should be murdered, by persons chosen for the purpose, in such a manner that the suspicion of the crime should attach itself to the aristocrats. He went to the place appointed, but Chabot, who was to have shared his fate, neither appeared himself, nor had made the necessary preparations for the assassination of his friend, for which Madame Roland, that high-spirited republican, dilates upon his poltroonery. Yet, what was this patriotic devotion, save a plan to support a false accusation against the innocent, by an act of murder and suicide, which, if the scheme succeeded, was to lead to massacre and proscription? The same false, exaggerated, and distorted views of the public good centering, as it seemed to them, in the establishment of a pure republic, led Barnave and others to palliate the massacres of September. Most of them might have said of the Liberty which they had worshipped, that at their death they found it an empty name. — S.

united, they rendered their sittings public, combined them with affiliated societies in all parts of France, and could thus, as from one common centre, agitate the most remote frontiers with the passionate feelings which electrified the metropolis. This formidable weapon was, in process of time, wrested out of the hands of the Federalists, as the original Republicans were invidiously called, by the faction who were generally termed Jacobins, from their influence in that society, and whose existence and peculiarities as a party, we have now to notice.

JACOBINS.

As yet this FOURTH, and, as it afterwards proved, most formidable party, lurked in secret among the Republicans of a higher order and purer sentiments, as they, on their part, had not yet raised the mask, or ventured to declare openly against the plan of a constitutional monarchy. The Jacobins⁸² were termed, in ridicule, *Les Enragés*, by the Republicans, who, seeing in them only men of a fiery disposition, and violence of deportment and declamation, vainly thought they could halloo them on, and call them off, at their pleasure. They were yet to learn, that when force is solemnly appealed to, the strongest and most ferocious, as they must be foremost in the battle, will not lose their share of the spoil, and are more likely to make the lion's partitions. These Jacobins affected to carry the ideas of liberty and equality to the most extravagant lengths, and were laughed at and ridiculed

⁸² So called, because the first sittings of the Club were held in the ancient convent of the Jacobins.

in the Assembly as a sort of fanatics, too absurd to be dreaded. Their character, indeed, was too exaggerated, their habits too openly profligate, their manners too abominably coarse, their schemes too extravagantly violent, to be produced in open day, while yet the decent forms of society were observed. But they were not the less successful in gaining the lower classes, whose cause they pretended peculiarly to espouse, whose passions they inflamed by an eloquence suited to such hearers, and whose tastes they flattered by affectation of brutal manners and vulgar dress. They soon, by these arts, attached to themselves a large body of followers, violently inflamed with the prejudices which had been infused into their minds, and too boldly desperate to hesitate at any measures which should be recommended by their demagogues. What might be the ultimate object of these men cannot be known. We can hardly give any of them credit for being mad enough to have any real patriotic feeling, however extravagantly distorted. Most probably, each had formed some vague prospect of terminating the affair to his own advantage; but, in the meantime, all agreed in the necessity of sustaining the revolutionary impulse, of deferring the return of quiet, and of resisting and deranging any description of orderly and peaceful government. They were sensible that the return of law, under any established and regular form whatever, must render them as contemptible as odious, and were determined to avail themselves of the disorder while it lasted, and to snatch at and enjoy such portions of the national wreck as the tempest might throw within

their individual reach.

This foul and desperate faction could not, by all the activity it used, have attained the sway which it exerted amongst the lees of the people, without possessing and exercising extensively the power of suborning inferior leaders among the populace. It has been generally asserted, that means for attaining this important object were supplied by the immense wealth of the nearest prince of the blood royal, that Duke of Orleans, whose name is so unhappily mixed with the history of this period. By his largesses, according to the general report of historians, a number of the most violent writers of pamphlets and newspapers were pensioned, who deluged the public with false news and violent abuse. This prince, it is said, recompensed those popular and ferocious orators, who nightly harangued the people in the Palais Royal, and openly stimulated them to the most violent aggressions upon the persons and property of obnoxious individuals. From the same unhappy man's coffers were paid numbers of those who regularly attended on the debates of the Assembly, crowded the galleries to the exclusion of the public at large, applauded, hissed, exercised an almost domineering influence in the national councils, and were sometimes addressed by the representatives of the people, as if they had themselves been the people of whom they were the scum and the refuse.

Fouler accusations even than these charges were brought forward. Bands of strangers, men of wild, haggard, and ferocious appearance, whose persons the still watchful police of Paris were

unacquainted with, began to be seen in the metropolis, like those obscene and ill-omened birds which are seldom visible except before a storm. All these were understood to be suborned by the Duke of Orleans and his agents, to unite with the ignorant, violent, corrupted populace of the great metropolis of France, for the purpose of urging and guiding them to actions of terror and cruelty. The ultimate object of these manœuvres is supposed to have been a change of dynasty, which should gratify the Duke of Orleans's revenge by the deposition of his cousin, and his ambition by enthroning himself in his stead, or at least by nominating him Lieutenant of France, with all the royal powers. The most daring and unscrupulous amongst the Jacobins are said originally to have belonged to the faction of Orleans; but as he manifested a want of decision, and did not avail himself of opportunities of pushing his fortune, they abandoned their leader, (whom they continued, however, to flatter and deceive,) and, at the head of the partisans collected for his service, and paid from his finances, they pursued the path of their individual fortunes.

Besides the various parties which we have detailed, and which gradually developed their discordant sentiments as the Revolution proceeded, the Assembly contained the usual proportion of that prudent class of politicians who are guided by events, and who, in the days of Cromwell, called themselves "Waiters upon Providence;" – men who might boast, with the miller in the tale, that though they could not direct the course of

the wind, they could adjust their sails so as to profit by it, blow from what quarter it would.

All the various parties in the Assembly, by whose division the King might, by temporizing measures, have surely profited, were united in a determined course of hostility to the crown and its pretensions, by the course which Louis XVI. was unfortunately advised to pursue. It had been resolved to assume a menacing attitude, and to place the King at the head of a strong force. Orders were given accordingly.

TREACHERY OF THE ARMY.

Necker, though approving of many parts of the proposal made to the Assembly at the Royal Sitting, had strongly dissented from others, and had opposed the measure of marching troops towards Versailles and Paris to overawe the capital, and, if necessary, the National Assembly. Necker received his dismissal,⁸³ and thus a second time the King and the people seemed to be prepared for open war. The force at first glance seemed entirely on the royal side. Thirty regiments were drawn around Paris and Versailles, commanded by Marshal Broglio,⁸⁴ an officer of eminence, and believed to be a zealous anti-revolutionist, and a large camp

⁸³ July 11. "The formal command to quit the kingdom was accompanied by a note from the King, in which he prayed him to depart in a private manner, for fear of exciting disturbances. Necker received this intimation just as he was dressing for dinner: he dined quietly, without divulging it to any one, and set out in the evening with Madame Necker for Brussels." – Mignet, tom. i., p. 47.

⁸⁴ The Marshal was born in 1718, and died, at the age of eighty-six, in 1804.

formed under the walls of the metropolis. The town was opened on all sides, and the only persons by whom defence could be offered were an unarmed mob; but this superiority existed only in appearance. The French Guards had already united themselves, or, as the phrase then went, *fraternized* with the people, yielding to the various modes employed to dispose them to the popular cause; and little attached to their officers, most of whom only saw their companies upon the days of parade or duty, an apparent accident, which probably had its origin in an experiment upon the feelings of these regiments, brought the matter to a crisis. The soldiers had been supplied secretly with means of unusual dissipation, and consequently a laxity of discipline was daily gaining ground among them. To correct this license, eleven of the guards had been committed to prison for military offences; the Parisian mob delivered them by violence, and took them under the protection of the inhabitants, a conduct which made the natural impression on their comrades. Their numbers were three thousand six hundred of the best soldiers in France, accustomed to military discipline, occupying every strong point in the city, and supported by its immense though disorderly populace.

The gaining these regiments gave the Revolutionists the command of Paris, from which the army assembled under Broglie might have found it hard to dislodge them; but these last were more willing to aid than to quell any insurrection which might take place. The modes of seduction which had succeeded with the French Guards were sedulously addressed

to other corps. The regiments which lay nearest to Paris were not forgotten. They were plied with those temptations which are most powerful with soldiers – wine, women, and money, were supplied in abundance – and it was amidst debauchery and undiscipline that the French army renounced their loyalty, which used to be even too much the god of their idolatry, and which was now destroyed like the temple of Persepolis, amidst the vapours of wine, and at the instigation of courtezans. There remained the foreign troops, of which there were several regiments, but their disposition was doubtful; and to use them against the citizens of Paris, might have been to confirm the soldiers of the soil in their indisposition to the royal cause, supported as it must then have been by foreigners exclusively.

Meanwhile, the dark intrigues which had been long formed for accomplishing a general insurrection in Paris, were now ready to be brought into action. The populace had been encouraged by success in one or two skirmishes with the gens-d'armes and foreign soldiery. They had stood a skirmish with a regiment of German horse, and had been successful. The number of desperate characters who were to lead the van in these violences, was now greatly increased. Deep had called to deep, and the revolutionary clubs of Paris had summoned their confederates from among the most fiery and forward of every province. Besides troops of galley-slaves and deserters, vagabonds of every order flocked to Paris, like ravens to the spoil. To these were joined the lowest inhabitants of a populous city, always ready for

riot and rapine; and they were led on and encouraged by men who were in many instances sincere enthusiasts in the cause of liberty, and thought it could only be victorious by the destruction of the present government. The Republican and Jacobin party were open in sentiment and in action, encouraging the insurrection by every means in their power. The Constitutionals, more passive, were still rejoiced to see the storm arise, conceiving such a crisis was necessary to compel the King to place the helm of the state in their hands. It might have been expected, that the assembled force of the crown would be employed to preserve the peace at least, and prevent the general system of robbery and plunder which seemed about to ensue. They appeared not, and the citizens themselves took arms by thousands, and tens of thousands, forming the burgher militia, which was afterwards called the National Guard. The royal arsenals were plundered to obtain arms, and La Fayette was adopted the commander-in-chief of this new army, a sufficient sign that they were to embrace what was called the Constitutional party. Another large proportion of the population was hastily armed with pikes, a weapon which was thence termed Revolutionary. The Baron de Besenval, at the head of the Swiss guards, two foreign regiments, and eight hundred horse, after an idle demonstration which only served to encourage the insurgents, retired from Paris without firing a shot, having, he says in his Memoirs, no orders how to act, and being desirous to avoid precipitating a civil war. His retreat was the signal for a general insurrection, in which the

French guard, the national guard, and the armed mob of Paris, took the Bastile, and massacred a part of the garrison, [July 14.]

We are not tracing minutely the events of the Revolution, but only attempting to describe their spirit and tendency; and we may here notice two changes, which for the first time were observed to have taken place in the character of the Parisian populace.

The *Baudauds de Paris*,⁸⁵ as they were called in derision, had been hitherto viewed as a light, laughing, thoughtless race, passionately fond of news, though not very acutely distinguishing betwixt truth and falsehood, quick in adopting impressions, but incapable of forming firm and concerted resolutions, still more incapable of executing them, and so easily overawed by an armed force, that about twelve hundred police soldiers had been hitherto sufficient to keep all Paris in subjection. But in the attack of the Bastile, they showed themselves resolute, and unyielding, as well as prompt and headlong. These new qualities were in some degree owing to the support which they received from the French guards; but are still more to be attributed to the loftier and more decided character belonging to the revolutionary spirit, and the mixture of men of the better classes, and of the high tone which belongs to them, among the mere rabble of the city. The garrison of this too-famous castle was indeed very weak, but its deep moats, and insurmountable bulwarks, presented the most imposing show of resistance; and the triumph which the popular cause obtained in an exploit seemingly so desperate, infused a

⁸⁵ Cockneys.

general consternation into the King and the Royalists.

MURDER OF FOULON AND BERTHIER.

The second remarkable particular was, that from being one of the most light-hearted and kind-tempered of nations, the French seemed, upon the Revolution, to have been animated not merely with the courage, but with the rabid fury of unchained wild-beasts. Foulon and Berthier, two individuals whom they considered as enemies of the people, were put to death, with circumstances of cruelty and insult fitting only at the death-stake of a Cherokee encampment; and, in emulation of literal cannibals, there were men, or rather monsters, found, not only to tear asunder the limbs of their victims, but to eat their hearts, and drink their blood.⁸⁶ The intensity of the new doctrines of freedom, the animosity occasioned by civil commotion, cannot account for these atrocities, even in the lowest and most ignorant of the populace. Those who led the way in such unheard-of enormities, must have been practised murderers and assassins, mixed with the insurgents, like old hounds in a young pack, to lead them on, flesh them with slaughter, and teach an example of cruelty too easily learned, but hard to be ever forgotten.

⁸⁶ "M. Foulon, an old man of seventy, member of the former Administration, was seized near his own seat, and with his hands tied behind his back, a crown of thistles on his head, and his mouth stuffed with hay, conducted to Paris, where he was murdered with circumstances of unheard-of cruelty. His son-in-law, Berthier, compelled to kiss his father's head, which was thrust into his carriage on a pike, shortly after shared his fate; and the heart of the latter was torn out of his palpitating body." – Lacroix, tom. vii., p. 117.

The metropolis was entirely in the hands of the insurgents, and civil war or submission was the only resource left to the sovereign. For the former course sufficient reasons might be urged. The whole proceedings in the metropolis had been entirely insurrectionary, without the least pretence of authority from the National Assembly, which continued sitting at Versailles, discussing the order of the day while the citizens of Paris were storming castles, and tearing to pieces their prisoners, without authority from the national representatives, and even without the consent of their own civic rulers. The provost of the merchants⁸⁷ was assassinated at the commencement of the disturbance, and a terrified committee of electors were the only persons who preserved the least semblance of authority, which they were obliged to exercise under the control and at the pleasure of the infuriated multitude. A large proportion of the citizens, though assuming arms for the protection of themselves and their families, had no desire of employing them against the royal authority; a much larger only united themselves with the insurgents, because, in a moment of universal agitation, they were the active and predominant party. Of these the former desired peace and protection; the latter, from habit and shame, must have soon deserted the side which was ostensibly conducted by ruffians and common stabbers, and drawn themselves to that

⁸⁷ M. de Flesselles. It was alleged that a letter had been found on the Governor of the Bastille, which implicated him in treachery to the public cause. – See Mignet, tom. i., p. 62.

which protected peace and good order. We have too good an opinion of a people so enlightened as those of France, too good an opinion of human nature in any country, to believe that men will persist in evil, if defended in their honest and legal rights.

CONDUCT OF THE KING.

What, in this case, was the duty of Louis XVI.? We answer without hesitation, that which George III. of Britain proposed to himself, when, in the name of the Protestant religion, a violent and disorderly mob opened prisons, destroyed property, burned houses, and committed, though with far fewer symptoms of atrocity, the same course of disorder which now laid waste Paris.⁸⁸ It is known that when his ministers hesitated to give an opinion in point of law concerning the employment of military force for protection of life and property against a disorderly banditti, the King, as chief magistrate, declared his own purpose to march into the blazing city at the head of his guards, and with the strong hand of war to subdue the insurgents, and restore peace to the affrighted capital.⁸⁹ The same call now sounded

⁸⁸ For an account of Lord George Gordon's riots in 1780, see *Annual Register*, vol. xxiii., p. 254; and Wraxall's *Own Time*, vol. i., p. 319.

⁸⁹ "If the gardes Françaises, in 1789, had behaved like our regular troops in 1780, the French Revolution might have been suppressed in its birth; but, the difference of character between the two sovereigns of Great Britain and of France, constituted one great cause of the different fate that attended the two monarchies. George the Third, when attacked, prepared to defend his throne, his family, his country, and the constitution intrusted to his care; they were in fact saved by his decision. Louis the Sixteenth tamely abandoned all to a ferocious Jacobin populace, who sent him to the

loudly in the ear of Louis. He was still the chief magistrate of the people, whose duty it was to protect their lives and property – still commander of that army levied and paid for protecting the law of the country, and the lives and property of the subject. The King ought to have proceeded to the National Assembly without an instant's delay, cleared himself before that body of the suspicions with which calumny had loaded him, and required and commanded the assistance of the representatives of the people to quell the frightful excesses of murder and rapine which dishonoured the capital. It is almost certain that the whole moderate party, as they were called, would have united with the Nobles and the Clergy. The throne was not yet empty, nor the sword unswayed. Louis had surrendered much, and might, in the course of the change impending, have been obliged to surrender more; but he was still King of France, still bound by his coronation oath to prevent murder and put down insurrection. He could not be considered as crushing the cause of freedom, in answering a call to discharge his kingly duty; for what had the cause of reformation, proceeding as it was by the peaceful discussion of an unarmed convention, to do with the open war waged by the insurgents of Paris upon the King's troops, or with the gratuitous murders and atrocities with which the capital had been polluted? With such members as shame and fear might have

scaffold. No man of courage or of principle could have quitted the former prince. It was impossible to save, or to rescue, the latter ill-fated, yielding, and passive monarch." – Wraxall, vol. i., p. 334.

brought over from the opposite side, the King, exerting himself as a prince, would have formed a majority strong enough to show the union which subsisted betwixt the Crown and the Assembly, when the protection of the laws was the point in question. With such a support – or without it – for it is the duty of the prince, in a crisis of such emergency, to serve the people, and save the country, by the exercise of his royal prerogative, whether with or without the concurrence of the other branches of the legislature, – the King, at the head of his *gardes du corps*, of the regiments which might have been found faithful, of the nobles and gentry, whose principles of chivalry devoted them to the service of their sovereign, ought to have marched into Paris, and put down the insurrection by the armed hand of authority, or fallen in the attempt, like the representative of Henry IV. His duty called upon him, and the authority with which he was invested enabled him, to act this part; which, in all probability, would have dismayed the factious, encouraged the timid, decided the wavering, and, by obtaining a conquest over lawless and brute violence, would have paved the way for a moderate and secure reformation in the state.

But having obtained this victory, in the name of the law of the realm, the King could only be vindicated in having resorted to arms, by using his conquest with such moderation, as to show that he threw his sword into the one scale, solely in order to balance the clubs and poniards of popular insurrection with which the other was loaded. He must then have evinced that he

did not mean to obstruct the quiet course of moderation and constitutional reform, in stemming that of headlong and violent innovation. Many disputes would have remained to be settled between him and his subjects; but the process of improving the constitution, though less rapid, would have been more safe and certain, and the kingdom of France might have attained a degree of freedom equal to that which she now possesses, without passing through a brief but dreadful anarchy to long years of military despotism, without the loss of mines of treasure, and without the expenditure of oceans of blood. To those who object the peril of this course, and the risk to the person of the sovereign from the fury of the insurgents, we can only answer, in the words of the elder Horatius, *Qu'il mourût*.⁹⁰ Prince or peasant have alike lived long enough, when the choice comes to be betwixt loss of life and an important duty undischarged. Death, at the head of his troops, would have saved Louis more cruel humiliation, his subjects a deeper crime.

We do not affect to deny, that in this course there was considerable risk of another kind, and that it is very possible that the King, susceptible as he was to the influence of those around him, might have lain under strong temptation to have resumed the despotic authority, of which he had in a great measure divested himself, and have thus abused a victory gained over insurrection into a weapon of tyranny. But the spirit of liberty was so strong

⁹⁰ "Que voulez-vous qu'il fit contre trois? Qu'il mourût, Ou qu'un beau désespoir alors le secourût." Corneille — Les Horaces, Act iii., Sc. 6.

in France, the principles of leniency and moderation so natural to the King, his own late hazards so great, and the future, considering the general disposition of his subjects, so doubtful, that we are inclined to think a victory by the sovereign at that moment would have been followed by temperate measures. How the people used theirs is but too well known. At any rate, we have strongly stated our opinion, that Louis would, at this crisis, have been justified in employing force to compel order, but that the crime would have been deep and inexpiable had he abused a victory to restore despotism.

It may be said, indeed, that the preceding statement takes too much for granted, and that the violence employed on the 14th July was probably only an anticipation of the forcible measures which might have been expected from the King against the Assembly. The answer to this is, that the successful party may always cast on the loser the blame of commencing the brawl, as the wolf punished the lamb for troubling the course of the water, though he drank lowest down the stream. But when we find one party completely prepared and ready for action, forming plans boldly, and executing them skilfully, and observe the other uncertain and unprovided, betraying all the imbecility of surprise and indecision, we must necessarily believe the attack was premeditated on the one side, and unexpected on the other.

The abandonment of thirty thousand stand of arms at the Hôtel des Invalides, which were surrendered without the slightest resistance, though three Swiss regiments lay encamped in the

Champs Elysées; the totally unprovided state of the Bastile, garrisoned by about one hundred Swiss and Invalids, and without provisions even for that small number; the absolute inaction of the Baron de Besenval, who – without entangling his troops in the narrow streets, which was pleaded as his excuse – might, by marching along the Boulevards, a passage so well calculated for the manœuvres of regular troops, have relieved the siege of that fortress;⁹¹ and, finally, that general's bloodless retreat from Paris, – show that the King had, under all these circumstances, not only adopted no measures of a hostile character, but must, on the contrary, have issued such orders as prevented his officer from repelling force by force.

We are led, therefore, to believe, that the scheme of assembling the troops round Paris was one of those half measures, to which, with great political weakness, Louis resorted more than once – an attempt to intimidate by the demonstration of force, which he was previously resolved not to use. Had his purposes of aggression been serious, five thousand troops of

⁹¹ We have heard from a spectator who could be trusted, that during the course of the attack on the Bastile, a cry arose among the crowd that the regiment of Royales Allemandes were coming upon them. There was at that moment such a disposition to fly, as plainly showed what would have been the effect had a body of troops appeared in reality. The Baron de Besenval had commanded a body of the guards, when, some weeks previously, they subdued an insurrection in the Fauxbourg St. Antoine. On that occasion many of the mob were killed; and he observes in his Memoirs, that, while the citizens of Paris termed him their preserver, he was very coldly received at court. He might be, therefore, unwilling to commit himself, by acting decidedly on the 14th July. – S.

loyal principles – and such might surely have been selected – would, acting suddenly and energetically, have better assured him of the city of Paris, than six times that number brought to waste themselves in debauch around its walls, and to be withdrawn without the discharge of a musket. Indeed, the courage of Louis was of a passive, not an active nature, conspicuous in enduring adversity, but not of that energetic and decisive character which turns dubious affairs into prosperity, and achieves by its own exertions the success which Fortune denies.

The insurrection of Paris being acquiesced in by the sovereign, was recognised by the nation as a legitimate conquest, instead of a state crime; and the tameness of the King in enduring its violence, was assumed as a proof that the citizens had but anticipated his intended forcible measures against the Assembly, and prevented the military occupation of the city. In the debates of the Assembly itself, the insurrection was vindicated; the fears and suspicions alleged as its motives were justified as well-founded; the passions of the citizens were sympathized with, and their worst excesses palliated and excused. When the horrors accompanying the murder of Berthier and Foulon were dilated upon by Lally Tolendal in the Assembly, he was heard and answered as if he had made mountains of mole-hills. Mirabeau said, that "it was a time to think, and not to feel." Barnave asked, with a sneer, "If the blood which had been shed was so pure?" Robespierre, rising into animation with acts of cruelty fitted to call forth the interest of such a mind, observed, that "the people,

oppressed for ages, had a right to the revenge of a day."

But how long did that day last, or what was the fate of those who justified its enormities? From that hour the mob of Paris, or rather the suborned agitators by whom the actions of that blind multitude were dictated, became masters of the destiny of France. An insurrection was organized whenever there was any purpose to be carried, and the Assembly might be said to work under the impulse of the popular current, as mechanically as the wheel of a water engine is driven by a cascade.

The victory of the Bastille was extended in its consequences to the Cabinet and to the Legislative body. In the former, those ministers who had counselled the King to stand on the defensive against the Assembly, or rather to assume a threatening attitude, suddenly lost courage when they heard the fate of Foulon and Berthier. The Baron de Breteuil, the unpopular successor of Necker, was deprived of his office, and driven into exile; and, to complete the triumph of the people, Necker himself was recalled by their unanimous voice.

The King came, or was conducted to, the Hôtel de Ville of Paris, in what, compared to the triumph of the minister, was a sort of ovation, in which he appeared rather as a captive than otherwise. He entered into the edifice under a vault of steel formed by the crossed sabres and pikes of those who had been lately engaged in combating his soldiers, and murdering his subjects. He adopted the cockade of the insurrection; and in doing so, ratified and approved of the acts done expressly against

his command, acquiesced in the victory obtained over his own authority, and completed that conquest by laying down his arms.

The conquest of the Bastile was the first, almost the only appeal to arms during the earlier part of the Revolution; and the popular success, afterwards sanctioned by the monarch, showed that nothing remained save the name of the ancient government. The King's younger brother, the Comte d'Artois, now reigning King of France,⁹² had been distinguished as the leader and rallying point of the Royalists. He left the kingdom with his children, and took refuge in Turin. Other distinguished princes, and many of the inferior nobility, adopted the same course, and their departure seemed to announce to the public that the royal cause was indeed desperate, since it was deserted by those most interested in its defence. This was the first act of general emigration, and although, in the circumstances, it may be excused, yet it must still be termed a great political error. For though, on the one hand, it is to be considered, that these princes and their followers had been educated in the belief that the government of France rested in the King's person, and was identified with him; and that when the King was displaced from his permanent situation of power, the whole social system of France was totally ruined, and nothing remained which could legally govern or be governed; yet, on the other hand, it must be remembered that the instant the emigrants crossed the frontier, they at once lost all the natural advantages of birth and education,

⁹² Charles the Tenth.

and separated themselves from the country which it was their duty to defend.

To draw to a head, and raise an insurrection for the purpose of achieving a counter revolution, would have been the ready and natural resource. But the influence of the privileged classes was so totally destroyed, that the scheme seems to have been considered as hopeless, even if the King's consent could have been obtained. To remain in France, whether in Paris or the departments, must have exposed them, in their avowed character of aristocrats, to absolute assassination. It has been therefore urged, that emigration was their only resource.

But there remained for these princes, nobles, and cavaliers, a more noble task, could they but have united themselves cordially to that portion of the Assembly, originally a strong one, which professed, without destroying the existing state of monarchy in France, to wish to infuse into it the spirit of rational liberty, and to place Louis in such a situation as should have ensured him the safe and honourable station of a limited monarch, though it deprived him of the powers of a despot. It is in politics, however, as in religion – the slighter in itself the difference between two parties, the more tenacious is each of the propositions in which they disagree. The pure Royalists were so far from being disposed to coalesce with those who blended an attachment to monarchy with a love of liberty, that they scarce accounted them fit to share the dangers and distresses to which all were alike reduced.

EMIGRATION.

This first emigration proceeded not a little perhaps on the feeling of self-consequence among those by whom it was adopted. The high-born nobles of which it was chiefly composed, had been long the WORLD, as it is termed, to Paris, and to each other, and it was a natural conclusion, that their withdrawing themselves from the sphere which they adorned, must have been felt as an irremediable deprivation. They were not aware how easily, in the hour of need, perfumed lamps are, to all purposes of utility, replaced by ordinary candles, and that, carrying away with them much of dignity, gallantry, and grace, they left behind an ample stock of wisdom and valour, and all the other essential qualities by which nations are governed and defended.

The situation and negotiations of the emigrants in the courts to which they fled, were also prejudicial to their own reputation, and consequently to the royal cause, to which they had sacrificed their country. Reduced "to show their misery in foreign lands," they were naturally desirous of obtaining foreign aid to return to their own, and laid themselves under the heavy accusation of instigating a civil war, while Louis was yet the resigned, if not the contented, sovereign of the newly modified empire. To this subject we must afterwards return.

The conviction that the ancient monarchy of France had fallen for ever, gave encouragement to the numerous parties which united in desiring a new constitution, although they differed on the principles on which it was to be founded. But all agreed that

it was necessary, in the first place, to clear away the remains of the ancient state of things. They resolved upon the abolition of all feudal rights, and managed the matter with so much address, that it was made to appear on the part of those who held them a voluntary surrender. The debate in the National Assembly [August 4] was turned by the popular leaders upon the odious character of the feudal rights and privileges, as being the chief cause of the general depression and discontent in which the kingdom was involved. The Nobles understood the hint which was thus given them, and answered it with the ready courage and generosity which has been at all times the attribute of their order, though sometimes these noble qualities have been indiscreetly exercised. "Is it from us personally that the nation expects sacrifices?" said the Marquis de Focault; "be assured that you shall not appeal in vain to our generosity. We are desirous to defend to the last the rights of the monarchy, but we can be lavish of our peculiar and personal interests."

THE DAY OF DUPES.

The same general sentiment pervaded at once the Clergy and Nobles, who, sufficiently sensible that what they resigned could not operate essentially to the quiet of the state, were yet too proud to have even the appearance of placing their own selfish interests in competition with the public welfare. The whole privileged classes seemed at once seized with a spirit of the most lavish generosity, and hastened to despoil themselves of all their peculiar immunities and feudal rights. Clergy and

laymen vied with each other in the nature and extent of their sacrifices. Privileges, whether prejudicial or harmless, rational or ridiculous, were renounced in the mass. A sort of delirium pervaded the Assembly; each member strove to distinguish the sacrifice of his personal claims by something more remarkable than had yet attended any of the previous renunciations. They who had no rights of their own to resign, had the easier and more pleasant task of surrendering those of their constituents: the privileges of corporations, the monopolies of crafts, the rights of cities, were heaped on the national altar; and the members of the National Assembly seemed to look about in ecstasy, to consider of what else they could despoil themselves and others, as if, like the silly old earl in the civil dissensions of England, there had been an actual pleasure in the act of renouncing.⁹³ The feudal rights were in many instances odious, in others oppressive, and in others ridiculous; but it was ominous to see the institutions of ages overthrown at random, by a set of men talking and raving all at once, so as to verify the observation of the Englishman, Williams, one of their own members, "The

⁹³ "Is there nothing else we can renounce?" said the old Earl of Pembroke and Montgomery, in the time of the Commonwealth, after he had joined in renouncing Church and King, Crown and Law. "Can no one think of any thing else? I love RENOUNCING." The hasty renunciations of the French nobles and churchmen were brought about in the manner practised of yore in convivial parties, when he who gave a toast burned his wig, had a loose tooth drawn, or made some other sacrifice, which, according to the laws of computation, was an example necessary to be imitated by all the rest of the company, with whatever prejudice to their wardrobes or their persons. — S.

fools! they would be thought to deliberate, when they cannot even listen." The singular occasion on which enthusiasm, false shame, and mutual emulation, thus induced the Nobles and Clergy to despoil themselves of all their seigneurial rights, was called by some the *day of the sacrifices*, by others, more truly, the *day of the dupes*.

During the currency of this legislative frenzy, as it might be termed, the popular party, with countenances affecting humility and shame at having nothing themselves to surrender, sat praising each new sacrifice, as the wily companions of a thoughtless and generous young man applaud the lavish expense by which they themselves profit, while their seeming admiration is an incentive to new acts of extravagance.

At length, when the sacrifice seemed complete, they began to pause and look around them. Some one thought of the separate distinctions of the provinces of France, as Normandy, Languedoc, and so forth. Most of these provinces possessed rights and privileges acquired by victory or treaty, which even Richelieu had not dared to violate. As soon as mentioned, they were at once thrown into the revolutionary smelting-pot, to be re-modelled after the universal equality which was the fashion of the day. It was not urged, and would not have been listened to, that these rights had been bought with blood, and sanctioned by public faith; that the legislature, though it had a right to extend them to others, could not take them from the possessors without compensation; and it escaped the Assembly no less, how

many honest and generous sentiments are connected with such provincial distinctions, which form, as it were, a second and inner fence around the love of a common country; or how much harmless enjoyment the poor man derives from the consciousness that he shares the privileges of some peculiar district. Such considerations might have induced the legislature to pause at least, after they had removed such marks of distinction as tended to engender jealousy betwixt inhabitants of the same kingdom. But her revolutionary level was to be passed over all that tended to distinguish one district, or one individual, from another.

There was one order in the kingdom which, although it had joined largely and readily in the sacrifices of the *day of dupes*, was still considered as indebted to the state, and was doomed to undergo an act of total spoliation. The Clergy had agreed, and the Assembly had decreed, on 4th August, that the tithes should be declared redeemable, at a moderate price, by the proprietors subject to pay them. This regulation ratified, at least, the legality of the Clergy's title. Nevertheless, in violation of the public faith thus pledged, the Assembly, three days afterwards, pretended that the surrender of tithes had been absolute, and that, in lieu of that supposed revenue, the nation was only bound to provide decently for the administration of divine worship. Even the Abbé Siêyes on this occasion deserted the revolutionary party, and made an admirable speech against this iniquitous measure.⁹⁴

⁹⁴ "Next day Siêyes gave vent to his spleen to Mirabeau, who answered, 'My dear abbé, you have unloosed the bull do you expect he is not to make use of his horns?'"

"You would be free," he exclaimed, with vehemence, "and you know not how to be just!" A curate in the Assembly, recalling to mind the solemn invocation by which the Tiers Etat had called upon the Clergy to unite with them, asked, with similar energy, "Was it to rob us, that you invited us to join with you in the name of the God of Peace?" Mirabeau, on the other hand, forgot the vehemence with which he had pleaded the right of property inherent in religious bodies, and lent his sophistry to defend what his own reasoning had proved in a similar case to be indefensible. The complaints of the Clergy were listened to in contemptuous silence, or replied to with bitter irony, by those who were conscious how little sympathy that body were likely to meet from the nation in general, and who therefore spoke "as having power to do wrong."

We must now revert to the condition of the kingdom of France at large, while her ancient institutions were crumbling to pieces of themselves, or were forcibly pulled down by state innovators. That fine country was ravaged by a civil war of aggravated horrors, waged betwixt the rich and poor, and marked by every species of brutal violence. The peasants, their minds filled with a thousand wild suppositions, and incensed by the general scarcity of provisions, were every where in arms, and every where attacked the chateaux of their *seigneurs*, whom they were incited to look upon as enemies of the Revolution, and particularly of the commons. In most instances they were

successful, and burnt the dwellings of the nobility, practising all the circumstances of rage and cruelty by which the minds of barbarians are influenced. Men were murdered in presence of their wives; wives and daughters violated before the eyes of their husbands and parents; some were put to death by lingering tortures; others by sudden and general massacre. Against some of these unhappy gentlemen, doubtless, the peasants might have wrongs to remember and to avenge; many of them, however, had borne their faculties so meekly that they did not even suspect the ill intentions of these peasants, until their castles and country-seats kindled with the general conflagration, and made part of the devouring element which raged through the whole kingdom.

What were the National Assembly doing at this dreadful crisis? They were discussing the abstract doctrines of the rights of man, instead of exacting from the subject the respect due to his social duties.

Yet a large party in the Convention, and who had hitherto led the way in the paths of the Revolution, now conceived that the goal was attained, and that it was time to use the curb and forbear the spur. Such was the opinion of La Fayette and his followers, who considered the victory over the Royalists as complete, and were desirous to declare the Revolution ended, and erect a substantial form of government on the ruins of monarchy, which lay prostrate at their feet.

They had influence enough in the Assembly to procure a set of resolutions, declaring the monarchy hereditary in the person

of the King and present family, on which basis they proceeded to erect what might be termed a Royal Democracy, or, in plainer terms, a Republic, governed, in truth, by a popular assembly, but encumbered with the expense of a king, to whom they desired to leave no real power, or free will to exercise it, although his name was to remain in the front of edicts, and although he was still to be considered entitled to command their armies, as the executive authority of the state.

THE VETO.

A struggle was made to extend the royal authority to an absolute negative upon the decrees of the representative body; and though it was limited by the jealousy of the popular party to a suspensive veto only, yet even this degree of influence was supposed too dangerous in the hands of a monarch who had but lately been absolute. There is indeed an evident dilemma in the formation of a democracy, with a king for its ostensible head. Either the monarch will remain contented with his daily parade and daily food, and thus play the part of a mere pageant, in which case he is a burdensome expense to the state, which a popular government, in prudent economy, as well as from the severity of principle assumed by republicans, are particularly bound to avoid; or else he will naturally endeavour to improve the shadow and outward form of power into something like sinew and substance, and the democracy will be unexpectedly assailed with the spear which they desired should be used only as their standard pole.

To these reasonings many of the deputies would perhaps have answered, had they spoken their real sentiments, that it was yet too early to propose to the French a pure republic, and that it was necessary to render the power of the King insignificant, before abolishing a title to which the public ear had been so long accustomed. In the meantime, they took care to divest the monarch of whatever protection he might have received from an intermediate senate, or chamber, placed betwixt the King and the National Assembly. "One God," exclaimed Rabaut St. Etienne, "one Nation, one King, and one Chamber." This advocate for unity at once and uniformity, would scarce have been listened to if he had added, "one nose, one tongue, one arm, and one eye;" but his first concatenation of unities formed a phrase; and an imposing phrase, which sounds well, and can easily be repeated, has immense force in a revolution. The proposal for a Second, or Upper Chamber, whether hereditary like that of England, or elective like that of America, was rejected as aristocratical. Thus the King of France was placed, in respect to the populace, as Canute of old to the advancing tide – he was entitled to sit on his throne and command the waves to respect him, and take the chance of their obeying his commands, or of being overwhelmed by them. If he was designed to be an integral part of the constitution, this should not have been – if he was considered as something that it was more seemly to abandon to his fate than to destroy by violence, the plan was not ill concerted.

CHAPTER V

Plan of the Democrats to bring the King and Assembly to Paris – Banquet of the Garde du Corps – Riot at Paris – A formidable Mob of Women assemble to march to Versailles – The National Guard refuse to act against the Insurgents, and demand also to be led to Versailles – The Female Mob arrive – Their behaviour to the Assembly – To the King – Alarming Disorders at Night – La Fayette arrives with the National Guard – Mob force the Palace – Murder the Body Guards – The Queen's safety endangered – Fayette's arrival with his Force restores Order – Royal Family obliged to go to reside at Paris – The Procession – This Step agreeable to the Views of the Constitutionals, Republicans, and Anarchists – Duke of Orleans sent to England.

We have mentioned the various restrictions upon the royal authority, which had been successively sanctioned by the National Assembly. But the various factions, all of which tended to democracy, were determined upon manœuvres for abating the royal authority, more actively powerful than those which the Assembly dared yet to venture upon. For this purpose, all those who desired to carry the Revolution to extremity, became desirous to bring the sittings of the National Assembly and the residence of the King within the precincts of Paris, and to place them under the influence of that popular frenzy which they had

so many ways of exciting, and which might exercise the authority of terror over the body of representatives, fill their galleries with a wild and tumultuous band of partisans, surround their gates with an infuriated populace, and thus dictate the issue of each deliberation. What fate was reserved for the King, after incidents will sufficiently show. To effect an object so important, the Republican party strained every effort, and succeeded in raising the popular ferment to the highest pitch.

Their first efforts were unsuccessful. A deputation, formidable from their numbers and clamorous violence, was about to sally from Paris to petition, as they called it, for the removal of the royal family and National Assembly to Paris, but was dispersed by the address of La Fayette and Bailli. Nevertheless it seemed decreed that the Republicans should carry their favourite measures, less through their own proper strength, great as that was, than by the advantage afforded by the blunders of the Royalists. An imprudence – it seems to deserve no harsher name – which occurred within the precincts of the royal palace at Versailles, gave the demagogues an opportunity, sooner probably than they expected, of carrying their point by a repetition of the violences which had already occurred.

The town of Versailles owed its splendour and wealth entirely to its being the royal residence, yet abounded with a population singularly ill-disposed towards the King and royal family. The national guard of the place, amounting to some thousands, were animated by the same feelings. There were only about four

hundred gardes du corps, or life-guards, upon whom reliance could be placed for the defence of the royal family, in case of any popular tumult either in Versailles itself, or directed thither from Paris. These troops consisted of gentlemen of trust and confidence, but their numbers were few in proportion to the extent of the palace, and their very quality rendered them obnoxious to the people as armed aristocrats.

About two-thirds of their number, to avoid suspicion and gain confidence, had been removed to Rambouillet. In these circumstances, the grenadiers of the French guards, so lately in arms, against the royal authority, with an inconsistency not unnatural to men of their profession, took it into their heads to become zealous for the recovery of the posts which they had formerly occupied around the King's person, and threatened openly to march to Versailles, to take possession of the routine of duty at the palace, a privilege which they considered as their due, notwithstanding that they had deserted their posts against the King's command, and were now about to resume them contrary to his consent. The regiment of Flanders was brought up to Versailles, to prevent a movement fraught with so much danger to the royal family. The presence of this corps had been required by the municipality, and the measure had been acquiesced in by the Assembly, though not without some expressive indications of suspicion.

BANQUET AT VERSAILLES.

The regiment of Flanders arrived accordingly, and the gardes

du corps, according to a custom universal in the French garrisons, invited the officers to an entertainment, at which the officers of the Swiss guards, and those of the national guard of Versailles were also guests. [Oct. 1.] This ill-omened feast was given in the opera hall of the palace, almost within hearing of the sovereigns; the healths of the royal family were drunk with the enthusiasm naturally inspired by the situation. The King and Queen imprudently agreed to visit the scene of festivity, carrying with them the Dauphin. Their presence raised the spirits of the company, already excited by wine and music, to the highest pitch; royalist tunes were played, the white cockade, distributed by the ladies who attended the Queen, was mounted with enthusiasm, and it is said that of the nation was trodden under foot.⁹⁵

If we consider the cause of this wild scene, it seems natural enough that the Queen, timid as a woman, anxious as a wife and a mother, might, in order to propitiate the favour of men who were summoned expressly to be the guard of the royal family, incautiously have recourse to imitate, in a slight degree, and towards one regiment, the arts of conciliation, which in a much grosser shape had been used by the popular party to shake the fidelity of the whole army. But it is impossible to conceive that the King, or ministers, could have hoped, by the transitory and drunken flash of enthusiasm elicited from a few hundred men during a carousal, to commence the counter-revolution, which they dared not attempt when they had at their command thirty

⁹⁵ Mignet, tom. i., p. 89; Lacretelle, tom. vii., p. 185.

thousand troops, under an experienced general.

But as no false step among the Royalists remained unimproved by their adversaries, the military feast of Versailles was presented to the people of Paris under a light very different from that in which it must be viewed by posterity. The Jacobins were the first to sound the alarm through all their clubs and societies, and the hundreds of hundreds of popular orators whom they had at their command, excited the citizens by descriptions of the most dreadful plots, fraught with massacres and proscriptions. Every effort had already been used to heat the popular mind against the King and Queen, whom, in allusion to the obnoxious power granted to them by the law, they had of late learned to curse and insult, under the names of Monsieur and Madame Veto. The King had recently delayed yielding his sanction to the declarations of the Rights of Man, until the constitution was complete. This had been severely censured by the Assembly, who spoke of sending a deputation to extort his consent to these declarations, before presenting him with the practical results which they intended to bottom on them. A dreadful scarcity, amounting nearly to a famine, rendered the populace even more accessible than usual to desperate counsels. The feasts, amid which the aristocrats were represented as devising their plots, seemed an insult on the public misery. When the minds of the lower orders were thus prejudiced, it was no difficult matter to produce an insurrection.

INSURRECTION IN PARIS.

That of the 5th October, 1789, was of a singular description, the insurgents being chiefly of the female sex. The market-women, "Dames de la Halle," as they are called, half unsexed by the masculine nature of their employments, and entirely so by the ferocity of their manners, had figured early in the Revolution. With these were allied and associated most of the worthless and barbarous of their own sex, such disgraceful specimens of humanity as serve but to show in what a degraded state it may be found to exist. Females of this description began to assemble early in the morning, in large groups, with the cries for "bread," which so easily rouse a starving metropolis. There were amongst them many men disguised as women, and they compelled all the females they met to go along with them. They marched to the Hôtel de Ville, broke boldly through several squadrons of the national guard, who were drawn up in front of that building for its defence, and were with difficulty dissuaded from burning the records it contained. They next seized a magazine of arms, with three or four pieces of cannon, and were joined by a miscellaneous rabble, armed with pikes, scythes, and similar instruments, who called themselves the conquerors of the Bastille. The still increasing multitude re-echoed the cry of "Bread, bread! – to Versailles! to Versailles!"⁹⁶

The national guard were now called out in force, but speedily showed their officers that they too were infected with the humour of the times, and as much indisposed to subordination as the

⁹⁶ Prudhomme, tom. i., p. 236; Thiers, tom. i., p. 135.

mob, to disperse which they were summoned. La Fayette put himself at their head, not to give his own, but to receive their orders. They refused to act against women, who, they said, were starving, and in their turn demanded to be led to Versailles, "to dethrone," – such was their language, – "the King, who was a driveller, and place the crown on the head of his son." La Fayette hesitated, implored, explained; but he had as yet to learn the situation of a revolutionary general. "Is it not strange," said one of his soldiers, who seemed quite to understand the military relation of officer and private on such an occasion, "is it not strange that La Fayette pretends to command the people, when it is his part to receive orders from them?"

Soon afterwards an order arrived from the Assembly of the Commune of Paris, enjoining the commandant's march, upon his own report that it was impossible to withstand the will of the people. He marched accordingly in good order, and at the head of a large force of the national guard, about four or five hours after the departure of the mob, who, while he waited in a state of indecision, were already far on their way to Versailles.

It does not appear that the King, or his ministers, had any information of these hostile movements. Assuredly, there could not have been a royalist in Paris willing to hazard a horse or a groom to carry such intelligence where the knowledge of it must have been so important. The leading members of the Assembly, at Versailles, were better informed. "These gentlemen," said Barbantanne, looking at the part of the hall where the Nobles and

Clergy usually sat, "wish more light – they shall have lanterns,"⁹⁷ they may rely upon it." Mirabeau went behind the chair of Mounier, the president. "Paris is marching upon us," he said. – "I know not what you mean," said Mounier. – "Believe me or not, all Paris is marching upon us – dissolve the sitting." – "I never hurry the deliberations," said Mounier. – "Then feign illness," said Mirabeau, – "go to the palace, tell them what I say, and give me for authority. But there is not a minute to lose – Paris marches upon us." – "So much the better," answered Mounier, "we shall be a republic the sooner."⁹⁸

Shortly after this singular dialogue, occasioned probably by a sudden movement, in which Mirabeau showed the aristocratic feelings from which he never could shake himself free, the female battalion, together with their masculine allies, continued their march uninterruptedly, and entered Versailles in the afternoon, singing patriotic airs, intermingled with blasphemous obscenities, and the most furious threats against the Queen.

⁹⁷ In the beginning of the Revolution, when the mob executed their pleasure on the individuals against whom their suspicions were directed, the lamp-irons served for gibbets, and the lines by which the lamps, or lanterns, were disposed across the street, were ready halters. Hence the cry of "Les Aristocrates à la lanterne." The answer of the Abbé Maury is well known. "Eh! mes amis, et quand vous m'auriez mis à la lanterne, est ce que vous verriez plus clair?" —*Biog. Univ.* – S.

⁹⁸ Mounier must be supposed to speak ironically, and in allusion, not to his own opinions, but to Mirabeau's revolutionary tenets. Another account of this singular conversation states his answer to have been, "All the better. If the mob kill all of us – remark, I say *all* of us, it will be the better for the country." – S. – Thiers, tom. i., p. 138.

Their first visit was to the National Assembly, where the beating of drums, shouts, shrieks, and a hundred confused sounds, interrupted the deliberations. A man called Mailliard, brandishing a sword in his hand, and supported by a woman holding a long pole, to which was attached a tambour de basque, commenced a harangue in the name of the sovereign people. He announced that they wanted bread; that they were convinced the ministers were traitors; that the arm of the people was uplifted, and about to strike; – with much to the same purpose, in the exaggerated eloquence of the period.⁹⁹ The same sentiments were echoed by his followers, mingled with the bitterest threats, against the Queen in particular, that fury could contrive, expressed in language of the most energetic brutality.

The Amazons then crowded into the Assembly, mixed themselves with the members, occupied the seat of the president, of the secretaries, produced or procured victuals and wine, drank, sung, swore, scolded, screamed, – abused some of the members, and loaded others with their loathsome caresses.¹⁰⁰

A deputation of these mad women was at length sent to St. Priest, the minister, a determined Royalist, who received them sternly, and replied, to their demand of bread, "When you had but one king, you never wanted bread – you have now twelve hundred

⁹⁹ Prudhomme, tom. i., p. 257.

¹⁰⁰ "In the gallery a crowd of fish women were assembled under the guidance of one virago with stentorian lungs, who called to the deputies familiarly by name, and insisted that their favourite Mirabeau should speak." – Dumont, p. 181.

— go ask it of them." They were introduced to the King, however, and were so much struck with the kind interest which he took in the state of Paris, that their hearts relented in his favour, and the deputies returned to their constituents, shouting "Vive le Roi!"¹⁰¹

MOB SURROUND THE PALACE.

Had the tempest depended on the mere popular breeze, it might now have been lulled to sleep; but there was a secret ground-swell, a heaving upwards of the bottom of the abyss, which could not be conjured down by the awakened feelings or convinced understandings of the deputation. A cry was raised that the deputies had been bribed to represent the King favourably; and, in this humour of suspicion, the army of Amazons stripped their garters, for the purpose of strangling their own delegates. They had by this time ascertained, that neither the national guard of Versailles, nor the regiment of Flanders, whose transitory loyalty had passed away with the fumes of the wine of the banquet, would oppose them by force, and that they had only to deal with the gardes du corps, who dared not to act with vigour, lest they should provoke a general attack on the palace, while the most complete distraction and indecision reigned within its precincts. Bold in consequence, the female mob seized on the exterior avenues of the palace, and threatened destruction to all within.

The attendants of the King saw it necessary to take measures

¹⁰¹ Mignet, tom. i., p. 92.

for the safety of his person, but they were marked by indecision and confusion. A force was hastily gathered of two or three hundred gentlemen, who, it was proposed, should mount the horses of the royal stud, and escort the King to Rambouillet, out of this scene of confusion.¹⁰² The gardes du corps, with such assistance, might certainly have forced their way through a mob or the tumultuary description which surrounded them; and the escape of the King from Versailles, under circumstances so critical, might have had a great effect in changing the current of popular feeling. But those opinions prevailed, which recommended that he should abide the arrival of La Fayette with the civic force of Paris.

It was now night, and the armed rabble of both sexes showed no intention of departing or breaking up. On the contrary, they bivouacked after their own manner upon the parade, where the soldiers usually mustered. There they kindled large fires, ate, drank, sang, caroused, and occasionally discharged their

¹⁰² This was proposed by that Marquis de Favras, whose death upon the gallows, [Feb. 19, 1790,] for a Royalist plot, gave afterwards such exquisite delight to the citizens of Paris. Being the first man of quality whom they had seen hanged, (that punishment having been hitherto reserved for plebeians,) they encored the performance, and would fain have hung him up a second time. The same unfortunate gentleman had previously proposed to secure the bridge at Sevres with a body of cavalry, which would have prevented the women from advancing to Versailles. The Queen signed an order for the horses with this remarkable clause: – "To be used if the King's safety is endangered, but in no danger which affects me only." – S. – "The secret of this intrigue never was known; but I have no doubt Favras was one of those men who, when employed as instruments, are led by vanity much further than their principals intend." – Dumont, p. 174.

firearms. Scuffles arose from time to time, and one or two of the gardes du corps had been killed and wounded in the quarrel, which the rioters had endeavoured to fasten on them; besides which, this devoted corps had sustained a volley from their late guests, the national guard of Versailles. The horse of a garde du corps, which fell into the hands of these female demons, was killed, torn in pieces, and eaten half raw and half roasted.¹⁰³ Every thing seemed tending to a general engagement, when late at night the drums announced the approach of La Fayette at the head of his civic army, which moved slowly but in good order.

The presence of this great force seemed to restore a portion of tranquillity, though no one appeared to know with certainty how it was likely to act. La Fayette had an audience of the King, explained the means he had adopted for the security of the palace, recommended to the inhabitants to go to rest, and unhappily set the example by retiring himself.¹⁰⁴ Before doing so, however, he also visited the Assembly, pledged himself for the safety of the royal family and the tranquillity of the night, and with some difficulty, prevailed on the President Mounier to adjourn the sitting, which had been voted permanent. He thus took upon himself the responsibility for the quiet of the night. We are loth to bring into question the worth, honour, and fidelity of La Fayette; and we can therefore only lament, that weariness should have so far overcome him at an important crisis,

¹⁰³ Lacretelle, tom. vii., p. 217.

¹⁰⁴ Rivarol, p. 300; Mignet, tom. i., p. 93.

and that he should have trusted to others the execution of those precautions, which were most grossly neglected.

A band of the rioters found means to penetrate into the palace about three in the morning, through a gate which was left unlocked and unguarded. They rushed to the Queen's apartment, and bore down the few gardes du corps who hastened to her defence. The sentinel knocked at the door of her bedchamber, called to her to escape, and then gallantly exposed himself to the fury of the murderers. His single opposition was almost instantly overcome, and he himself left for dead. Over his bleeding body they forced their way into the Queen's apartment; but their victim, reserved for farther and worse woes, had escaped by a secret passage into the chamber of the King, while the assassins, bursting in, stabbed the bed she had just left with pikes and swords.¹⁰⁵

¹⁰⁵ One of the most accredited calumnies against the unfortunate Marie Antoinette pretends, that she was on this occasion surprised in the arms of a paramour. Buonaparte is said to have mentioned this as a fact, upon the authority of Madame Campan. [O'Meara's *Napoleon in Exile*, vol. ii., p. 172.] We have now Madame Campan's own account, [Memoirs, vol. ii. p. 78.] describing the conduct of the Queen on this dreadful occasion as that of a heroine, and totally excluding the possibility of the pretended anecdote. But let it be farther considered, under what circumstances the Queen was placed – at two in the morning, retired to a privacy liable to be interrupted (as it was) not only by the irruption of the furious banditti who surrounded the palace, demanding her life, but by the entrance of the King, or of others, in whom circumstances might have rendered the intrusion duty; and let it then be judged, whether the dangers of the moment, and the risk of discovery, would not have prevented Messalina herself from choosing such a time for an assignation. – S.

MURDER OF THE BODY GUARDS.

The gardes du corps assembled in the ante-chamber called the bull's eye, and endeavoured there to defend themselves; but several, unable to gain this place of refuge, were dragged down into the courtyard, where a wretch, distinguished by a long beard, a broad bloody axe, and a species of armour which he wore on his person, had taken on himself, by taste and choice, the office of executioner. The strangeness of the villain's costume, the sanguinary relish with which he discharged his office, and the hoarse roar with which, from time to time, he demanded new victims, made him resemble some demon whom hell had vomited forth, to augment the wickedness and horror of the scene.¹⁰⁶

Two of the gardes du corps were already beheaded, and the Man with the Beard was clamorous to do his office upon the others who had been taken, when La Fayette, roused from his repose, arrived at the head of a body of grenadiers of the old French guards, who had been lately incorporated with the civic guard, and were probably the most efficient part of his force. He did not think of avenging the unfortunate gentlemen, who lay murdered before his eyes for the discharge of their military

¹⁰⁶ The miscreant's real name was Jourdan, afterwards called *Coupe-Tête*, distinguished in the massacres of Avignon. He gained his bread by sitting as an academy-model to painters, and for that reason cultivated his long beard. In the depositions before the Chatelet, he is called *L'Homme à la barbe*— an epithet which might distinguish the ogre or goblin of some ancient legend. — S.

duty, but he entreated his soldiers to save him the dishonour of breaking his word, which he had pledged to the King, that he would protect the gardes du corps. It is probable he attempted no more than was in his power, and so far acted wisely, if not generously.

To redeem M. de la Fayette's pledge, the grenadiers did, what they ought to have done in the name of the King, the law, the nation, and insulted humanity, – they cleared, and with perfect ease, the court of the palace from these bands of murderous bacchantes, and their male associates. The instinct of ancient feelings, was, in some degree, awakened in the grenadiers. They experienced a sudden sensation of compassion and kindness for the gardes du corps, whose duty on the royal person they had in former times shared. There arose a cry among them, – "Let us save the gardes du corps, who saved us at Fontenoy." They took them under their protection, exchanged their caps with them in sign of friendship and fraternity, and a tumult, which had something of the character of joy, succeeded to that which had announced nothing but blood and death.¹⁰⁷

The outside of the palace was still besieged by the infuriated mob, who demanded, with hideous cries, and exclamations the most barbarous and obscene, to see "the Austrian," as they called the Queen. The unfortunate princess appeared on the balcony¹⁰⁸ with one of her children in each hand. A voice from the crowd

¹⁰⁷ Lacretelle, tom. vii., p. 238.

¹⁰⁸ Thiers, tom. i., p. 182; Lacretelle, tom. vii., p. 241.

called out, "No children," as if on purpose to deprive the mother of that appeal to humanity which might move the hardest heart. Marie Antoinette, with a force of mind worthy of Maria Theresa, her mother, pushed her children back into the room, and, turning her face to the tumultuous multitude, which tossed and roared beneath, brandishing their pikes and guns with the wildest attitudes of rage, the reviled, persecuted, and denounced Queen stood before them, her arms folded on her bosom, with a noble air of courageous resignation.¹⁰⁹ The secret reason of this summons – the real cause of repelling the children – could only be to afford a chance of some desperate hand among the crowd executing the threats which resounded on all sides. Accordingly, a gun was actually levelled, but one of the bystanders struck it down; for the passions of the mob had taken an opposite turn, and, astonished at Marie Antoinette's noble presence, and graceful firmness of demeanour, there arose, almost in spite of themselves, a general shout of "Vive la Reine!"¹¹⁰

But if the insurgents, or rather those who prompted them, missed their first point, they did not also lose their second. A cry arose, "To Paris!" at first uttered by a solitary voice, but gathering strength, until the whole multitude shouted, "To Paris – to Paris!"¹¹¹ The cry of these blood-thirsty bacchanals, such as

¹⁰⁹ Rivarol, p. 312; Campan, vol. ii., p. 81.

¹¹⁰ Mémoires de Weber, vol. ii., p. 457. – S.

¹¹¹ "The Queen, on returning from the balcony, approached my mother, and said to her, with stifled sobs, 'They are going to force the King and me to Paris, with the

they had that night shown themselves, was, it seems, considered as the voice of the people, and as such, La Fayette neither remonstrated himself, nor permitted the King to interpose a moment's delay in yielding obedience to it; nor was any measure taken to put some appearance even of decency on the journey, or to disguise its real character, of a triumphant procession of the sovereign people, after a complete victory over their nominal monarch.

PROCESSION TO PARIS.

The carriages of the royal family were placed in the middle of an immeasurable column, consisting partly of La Fayette's soldiers, partly of the revolutionary rabble, whose march had preceded his, amounting to several thousand men and women of the lowest and most desperate description, intermingling in groups amongst the bands of French guards and civic soldiers, whose discipline could not enable them to preserve even a semblance of order. Thus they rushed along, howling their songs of triumph. The harbingers of the march bore the two bloody heads of the murdered gardes du corps, paraded on pikes, at the head of the column, as the emblems of their prowess and success.¹¹² The rest of this body, worn down by fatigue, most of

heads of our body-guards carried before us, on the point of their pikes.' Her prediction was accomplished." – M. de Staël, vol. i., p. 344.

¹¹² It has been said that they were borne immediately before the royal carriage; but this is an exaggeration where exaggeration is unnecessary. These bloody trophies preceded the royal family a great way on the march to Paris. – S.

them despoiled of their arms, and many without hats, anxious for the fate of the royal family, and harassed with apprehensions for themselves, were dragged like captives in the midst of the mob, while the drunken females around them bore aloft in triumph their arms, their belts, and their hats. These wretches, stained with the blood in which they had bathed themselves, were now singing songs, of which the burden bore – "We bring you the baker, his wife, and the little apprentice!"¹¹³ as if the presence of the unhappy royal family, with the little power they now possessed, had been in itself a charm against scarcity. Some of these Amazons rode upon the cannon, which made a formidable part of the procession. Many of them were mounted on the horses of the gardes du corps, some in masculine fashion, others *en croupe*. All the muskets and pikes which attended this immense cavalcade, were garnished, as if in triumph, with oak boughs, and the women carried long poplar branches in their hands, which gave the column, so grotesquely composed in every respect, the appearance of a moving grove.¹¹⁴ Scarcely a circumstance was omitted which could render this entrance into the capital more insulting to the King's feelings – more degrading to the royal dignity.

After six hours of dishonour and agony, the unfortunate Louis was brought to the Hôtel de Ville, where Bailli, then

¹¹³ "Nous ne manquerons plus de pain; nous amenons le boulanger, la boulangère, et le petit mitron!" – Prudhomme, tom. i., p. 244.

¹¹⁴ Prudhomme, tom. i., p. 243.

mayor,¹¹⁵ complimented him upon the "beau jour," the "splendid day," which restored the monarch of France to his capital; assured him that order, peace, and all the gentler virtues, were about to revive in the country under his royal eye, and that the King would henceforth become powerful through the people, the people happy through the King; and, "what was truest of all," that as Henry IV. had entered Paris by means of reconquering his people, Louis XVI. had done so, because his people had reconquered their King.¹¹⁶ His wounds salved with this lip-comfort, the unhappy and degraded prince was at length permitted to retire to the palace of the Tuileries, which, long uninhabited, and almost unfurnished, yawned upon him like the tomb where alone he at length found repose.¹¹⁷

¹¹⁵ "The King said to the mayor, 'I come with pleasure to my good city of Paris;' the Queen added, 'and with confidence.' The expression was happy, but the event, alas! did not justify it." – M. de Staël, vol. i., p. 344.

¹¹⁶ The Mayor of Paris, although such language must have sounded like the most bitter irony, had no choice of words on the 6th October, 1789. But if he seriously termed that "a glorious day," what could Bailli complain of the studied insults and cruelties which he himself sustained, when, in Oct. 1792, the same banditti of Paris, who forced the King from Versailles, dragged himself to death, with every circumstance of refined cruelty and protracted insult? – S. – It was not on the 6th October, but the 17th July, three days after the capture of the Bastille, that Bailli, on presenting Louis with the keys of Paris, made use of this expression. – See Prudhomme, tom. i., p. 203.

¹¹⁷ "As the arrival of the royal family was unexpected, very few apartments were in a habitable state, and the Queen had been obliged to get tent-beds put up for her children in the very room where she received us; she apologized for it, and added, 'You know that I did not expect to come here.' Her physiognomy was beautiful, but irritated; it

The events of the 14th July, 1789, when the Bastille was taken, formed the first great stride of the Revolution, actively considered. Those of the 5th and 6th of October, in the same year, which we have detailed at length, as peculiarly characteristic of the features which it assumed, made the second grand phasis. The first had rendered the inhabitants of the metropolis altogether independent of their sovereign, and indeed of any government but that which they chose to submit to; the second deprived the King of that small appearance of freedom which he had hitherto exercised, and fixed his dwelling in the midst of his metropolis, independent and self-regulated as we have described it. "It is wonderful," said Louis, "that with such love of liberty on all sides, I am the only person that is deemed totally unworthy of enjoying it." Indeed, after the march from Versailles, the King could only be considered as the signet of royal authority, used for attesting public acts at the pleasure of those in whose custody he was detained, but without the exercise of any free-will on his own part.

All the various parties found their account, less or more, in this state of the royal person, excepting the pure Royalists, whose effective power was little, and their comparative numbers few. There remained, indeed, attached to the person and cause of Louis, a party of those members, who, being friends to freedom, were no less so to regulated monarchy, and who desired to fix the throne on a firm and determined basis. But their numbers

were daily thinned, and their spirits were broken. The excellent Mounier, and the eloquent Lally Tolendal, emigrated after the 9th October, unable to endure the repetition of such scenes as were then exhibited. The indignant adieus of the latter to the National Assembly, were thus forcibly expressed: —

"It is impossible for me, even my physical strength alone considered, to discharge my functions amid the scenes we have witnessed. Those heads borne in trophy; that Queen half assassinated; that King dragged into Paris by troops of robbers and assassins; the 'splendid day' of M. Bailli; the jests of Barnave, when blood was floating around us; Mounier escaping, as if by miracle, from a thousand assassins; these are the causes of my oath never again to enter that den of cannibals. A man may endure a single death; he may brave it more than once, when the loss of life can be useful — but no power under Heaven shall induce me to suffer a thousand tortures every passing minute — while I am witnessing the progress of cruelty, the triumph of guilt, which I must witness without interrupting it. They may proscribe my person, they may confiscate my fortune; I will labour the earth for my bread, and I will see them no more."¹¹⁸

The other parties into which the state was divided, saw the events of the 5th October with other feelings, and if they did not forward, at least found their account in them.

VIEWS OF THE CONSTITUTIONALISTS.

¹¹⁸ Lacretelle, tom. vii., p. 265.

The Constitutional party, or those who desired a democratical government with a king at its head, had reason to hope that Louis, being in Paris, must remain at their absolute disposal, separated from those who might advise counter-revolutionary steps, and guarded only by national troops, embodied in the name, and through the powers, of the Revolution. Every day, indeed, rendered Louis more dependent on La Fayette and his friends, as the only force which remained to preserve order; for he soon found it a necessary, though a cruel measure, to disband his faithful gardes du corps, and that perhaps as much with a view to their safety as to his own.

The Constitutional party seemed strong both in numbers and reputation. La Fayette was commandant of the national guards, and they looked up to him with that homage and veneration with which young troops, and especially of this description, regard a leader of experience and bravery, who, in accepting the command, seems to share his laurels with the citizen-soldier, who has won none of his own. Bailli was Mayor of Paris, and, in the height of a popularity not undeserved, was so well established in the minds of the better class of citizens, that, in any other times than those in which he lived, he might safely have despised the suffrages of the rabble, always to be bought, either by largesses or flattery. The Constitutionals had also a strong majority in the Assembly, where the Republicans dared not yet throw off the mask, and the Assembly, following the person of the King, came

also to establish its sittings in their stronghold, the metropolis.¹¹⁹

¹¹⁹ "On being informed of the King's determination to quit Versailles for Paris, the Assembly hastily passed a resolution, that it was inseparable from the King, and would accompany him to the capital." – Thiers, tom. i., p. 182.

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