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**Joseph  
de Maistre**

**Considerations on  
France**

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**Edited by**

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**Richard A. Lebrun**

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**Introduction by**

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**Isaiah Berlin**

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Joseph de Maistre's *Considerations on France* is the best known French equivalent of Edmund Burke's *Reflections on the Revolution in France*. This new edition of Richard Lebrun's 1974 translation is introduced by Isaiah Berlin, with a bibliography and chronology by the translator. Published in 1797, the work of the self-exiled Maistre presents a providential interpretation of the French Revolution and argues for a new alliance of throne and altar under a restored Bourbon monarchy. Although the Directory and then Napoleon delayed Maistre's influence within France until the Restoration, he is now acknowledged as the most eloquent spokesperson for continental conservatism. *Considerations on France* was a shrewd piece of propaganda, but, as Isaiah Berlin contends, by arguing his case in broad historical, philosophical and religious terms, Maistre raises issues of enduring importance.



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JOSEPH DE MAISTRE  
*Considerations on France*

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JOSEPH DE MAISTRE

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*Considerations on France*

TRANSLATED AND EDITED BY

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INTRODUCTION BY

ISAIAH BERLIN



CAMBRIDGE  
UNIVERSITY PRESS

PUBLISHED BY THE PRESS SYNDICATE OF THE UNIVERSITY OF CAMBRIDGE  
The Pitt Building, Trumpington Street, Cambridge, United Kingdom

CAMBRIDGE UNIVERSITY PRESS

The Edinburgh Building, Cambridge CB2 2RU, UK  
40 West 20th Street, New York, NY 10011-4211, USA  
477 Williamstown Road, Port Melbourne, VIC 3207, Australia  
Ruiz de Alarcón 13, 28014 Madrid, Spain  
Dock House, The Waterfront, Cape Town 8001, South Africa

<http://www.cambridge.org>

Translation of Maistre's *Considerations on France* by Richard Lebrun

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Introduction © 1994 Isaiah Berlin

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First published 1994

Third printing 2003

Printed in the United Kingdom at the University Press, Cambridge

*A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library*

*Library of Congress Cataloguing in Publication data*

Maistre, Joseph Marie, comte de, 1753-1821.

[*Considerations sur la France*. English]

*Considerations on France* / Joseph De Maistre: edited by

Richard A. Lebrun, with an Introduction by Isaiah Berlin

p. cm. – (Cambridge texts in the history of political thought)

Includes bibliographical references and index.

ISBN 0 521 46076 X. – ISBN 0 521 46628 8 (pbk.)

1. France – Politics and government – 1789-1799. 2. France –  
History – Revolution, 1789-1799 – Causes. I. Berlin, Isaiah, Sir.  
II. Lebrun, Richard. III. Title. IV. Series.

DC155.M2313 1994

944.04 – dc20 93-46986 CIP

ISBN 0 521 46076 X hardback

ISBN 0 521 46628 8 paperback

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## Note on the Introduction

Isaiah Berlin's introduction began life as a radio lecture, given on the Third Programme of the BBC on 3 December 1952, the last in a series of six entitled 'Freedom and its Betrayal'. The version that appears here is a transcript of that lecture, edited for publication by Henry Hardy. The informality and rhetorical qualities of the lecture, which was not given from a fully prepared text, have on the whole been deliberately preserved; and no changes of substance have been made with this new context in mind. Readers interested in a fuller account of Isaiah Berlin's views on Maistre may consult his long essay, 'Joseph de Maistre and the Origins of Fascism', which appears in his book, *The Crooked Timber of Humanity: Chapters in the History of Ideas*, edited by Henry Hardy (London, 1990; New York, 1991). It will be clear to anyone who consults Richard Lebrun's own studies of Maistre (listed in the Bibliography, p. xl) that he is not entirely in agreement with the interpretations offered in the introduction.



# Introduction

ISAIAH BERLIN

## I

Joseph de Maistre was a very frightening figure to many of his contemporaries – frightening because of what he wrote rather than because of what he was. Indeed his contemporaries had not very much chance of meeting him, since the most important years of his life were spent in the service of the King of Sardinia, and at the court of St Petersburg, to which he was appointed as diplomatic representative. He was frightening to them because of the violence, the intransigence and the extremely uncompromising and hard-headed dogmatism with which he wished to strike down the doctrines of which he disapproved.

The normal view of him is fairly stated by Émile Faguet, perhaps the most accurate and the fairest-minded critic of Maistre in France in the nineteenth century. He calls Maistre ‘a fierce absolutist, a furious theocrat, an intransigent legitimist, apostle of a monstrous trinity composed of Pope, King and Hangman, always and everywhere the champion of the hardest, narrowest and most inflexible dogmatism, a dark figure out of the Middle Ages, part learned doctor, part inquisitor, part executioner’.<sup>1</sup> And again, ‘his Christianity is terror, passive obedience and the religion of the State’;<sup>2</sup> his faith is merely ‘a slightly touched-up paganism’;<sup>3</sup> he is a ‘Praetorian of the

<sup>1</sup> Émile Faguet, *Politiques et moralistes du dix-neuvième siècle*, 1st series (Paris, 1899): p. 1.

<sup>2</sup> *ibid.*, p. 59.

<sup>3</sup> *ibid.* (‘un paganisme un peu “nettoyé” ’).

Vatican'.<sup>4</sup> An admirer speaks of his 'Christianity of terror';<sup>5</sup> Edgar Quinet, a Protestant under the influence of the German romantics, writes of Maistre's 'inexorable God aided by the hangman; the Christ of a permanent Committee of Public Safety';<sup>6</sup> and in our own day the Spanish philosopher Miguel de Unamuno refers to Maistre's 'slaughter-house'.<sup>7</sup>

This is the usual portrait of him, largely invented by Sainte-Beuve, and perpetuated by various other thinkers in the nineteenth century. Maistre is painted, always, as a fanatical monarchist and a still more fanatical supporter of papal authority; proud, bigoted, inflexible, with a strong will and an unbelievable power of rigid reasoning from dogmatic premisses to extreme and unpalatable conclusions; brilliant, embittered, a medieval doctor born out of his time, vainly seeking to arrest the current of history; a distinguished anomaly, formidable, hostile, solitary and ultimately pathetic; at best a tragic patrician figure, defying and denouncing a shifty and vulgar world, into which he had been incongruously born; at worst an unbending, self-blinded die-hard pouring curses upon the marvellous new age whose benefits he was too wilful to see, and too callous to feel.

His works are regarded as interesting and *outré* rather than important – the last despairing effort of feudalism in the dark ages to resist the march of progress. He is described either as a brave but doomed paladin of a lost cause, or as a foolish or odious survival of the older and more heartless generation, according to whatever attitude the nineteenth-century critics happen to take. But both sides, whether for or against him, always assume that his day is done, that his world has no relevance to anything contemporary. This is the point of view which is shared alike by Victor Hugo and Lamennais, by Sainte-Beuve and Faguet, by James Stephen and Morley, and particularly by Harold Laski, who wrote an essay on him in which he took the view that Maistre was to be rejected as a played-out force.

This view, which may have been intelligible in the nineteenth century, seems absurd in the present age. For although Maistre may

<sup>4</sup> *ibid.*, p. 60.

<sup>5</sup> S. Rocheblave, 'Étude sur Joseph de Maistre', *Revue d'histoire et de philosophie religieuses* 2 (1922), p. 312.

<sup>6</sup> E. Quinet, *Le Christianisme et la Révolution française* (Paris, 1845), pp. 357–8.

<sup>7</sup> '[El] matadero del difunto conde José de Maistre'. Miguel de Unamuno, *La agonía del cristianismo*: p. 308 in *Obras completas*, ed. Manuel García Blanco (Madrid, 1966– ), vol. VII.

have spoken the language of the past, the content of what he had to say is the absolute substance of anti-democratic talk of our day; in comparison with his progressive contemporaries he is really ultra-modern, born not so much after as before his time. If his ideas did not have more immediate influence, it is because the soil in his own time was unreceptive. His doctrines, and still more his attitude of mind, had to wait a century before they came – as come they did – into their own.

## II

Maistre's task, in his own eyes, was to destroy everything which the eighteenth century had built up. Let me explain how he came by this state of mind. He was born in 1753 in Chambéry in Savoy, then part of the kingdom of Piedmont-Sardinia, which was relatively enlightened in the eighteenth century, having abolished feudalism a good many years before the French did so. Like other liberal aristocrats, Maistre was a mild reformer, not particularly reactionary and not particularly bigoted. He was a grown man when the Revolution finally broke out. He was over thirty, and like others who went through the Revolution – like Saint-Simon, like Schiller, like Hegel – he took most violently against it. The spectacle of the Jacobin Terror was something which he never forgot for the rest of his life, and this is what turned him into an implacable enemy of everything that is liberal, democratic, high-minded, everything connected with intellectuals, critics, scientists, everything which was to do with the kind of forces which created the French Revolution. When he talks about Voltaire he talks about him almost as if he were a personal enemy.

Being a Savoyard, Maistre entered the royal service, and began writing pamphlets, after the French revolutionaries had invaded Savoy, against the Revolution. These pamphlets were very sharp: they had a peculiar freshness, indeed a ferocity, which immediately attracted attention. But the King of Sardinia felt that he was an uncomfortable man to have about the court. The court was very small, very limited, rather provincial, and Maistre was too brilliant, too active, too imaginative and too interesting a man to be altogether comfortable there. But he was obviously very able, and he attracted a great deal of attention by the brilliance of his writings. Consequently it was decided to send him as far away as possible, and he was duly

sent away to St Petersburg as a minister of the King of Sardinia, or the equivalent of a minister, from 1803 until he left in 1817.

In St Petersburg he was regarded as a man of particular charm, courtesy, urbanity; he was a brilliant and agreeable conversationalist, delightful company and greatly sought after in society. He enjoyed his life in St Petersburg; he was fascinated by the Russian monarchy, and he got on very well with the immediate circles around Alexander I; indeed that Emperor used him as a political adviser at various moments during his reign.

After the war against Napoleon was over, for some reason Alexander demanded his recall; it may be that he had converted too many ladies of fashion to the Roman Church. Several of these ladies were destined to play a very large part in Catholic circles in Western Europe. Possibly he interfered a little too much in Russian policy, with so strong a personality; at any rate, the King of Sardinia, now restored to his throne, was induced to recall him. He went back to Turin, the capital, was given a sinecure, and died, in considerable honour but with no kind of political power, or indeed any other kind of power, in 1821. His reputation is largely posthumous.

### III

The aim to which Maistre addressed himself most vigorously, as I say, was to destroy the eighteenth century, and the thought of the eighteenth century. It is a mistake to assume that the thought of the eighteenth century was a seamless garment; indeed, some of the eighteenth-century thinkers were divided by deep differences. But there are certain things which are common to them all. They might not all believe in progress; they might not all believe in God; they might not all believe in the immortality of the soul. Some of them believed in intuition; others believed in empiricism. Some believed in spontaneity and simplicity of feeling; others believed in science and sophistication. What they had in common was the belief that men were by nature, if not good, at any rate not bad, potentially benevolent, and that each man was the best expert on his own interests and his own values, when he was not being bamboozled by knaves or fools; that on the whole men were prone to follow the rules of conduct which their own understanding suggested to them. Most thinkers of the eighteenth century believed that progress was desirable – that is

to say, for example, that freedom is better than slavery; that legislation founded on what was called 'the precepts of nature' could right almost every wrong; that nature was only reason in action, and its workings, therefore, could in principle be deduced from a set of axioms like those of a theory in geometry, or like those of physics and chemistry, if only you knew them. They believed that all things that were good and true and virtuous and free were necessarily compatible, and indeed more than that, that they were interconnected. The more empirically minded among them were sure that the science of human nature could be developed no less than that of inanimate things, that ethical and political questions, provided they were genuine – and how could they not be so? – could be answered no less certainly than those of mathematics and astronomy, and that a life founded upon these answers would be free, secure, happy and wise. They believed that the millennium could be reached by the use of faculties and the practice of methods which had for over a century, in the spheres both of knowledge and of action, led to triumphs more magnificent than any hitherto attained in human history. That, roughly speaking, is the common belief, the general temper and attitude, of the rational thinkers of the eighteenth century.

All this Maistre set himself to destroy completely. Any characteristic of the eighteenth century of this kind he was determined to root up so that it should stand no more. He took on this enormous task because he believed that the Revolution in which the innocent had suffered was an appalling disaster. He had loved and admired France from outside (he was on the margins of it in Savoy) with the peculiar passion which people on the edges of countries have for those countries when they wish to be identified with them – there are many instances of this in history. With the peculiar indignation born of the desire to demolish a really golden ideal, he determined to discredit the forces which in his opinion were responsible for the destruction of his dream. Therefore, in place of the *a priori* formulae of idealistic sociology, he decided to appeal to the empirical facts of history and to observe human behaviour. In place of the ideals of progress, liberty, perfectibility he preached the sacredness of the past, the virtue, and the necessity, indeed, of complete subjection, because of the incurably bad and corrupt nature of man. In place of science he preached the primacy of instinct, superstition, prejudice. In place of optimism, pessimism. In place of eternal harmony and eternal peace, the neces-



sity – for him the divine necessity – of conflict, of suffering, of bloodshed, of war. In the place of peace and social equality, of common interests and the simple nature of the uncorrupted natural man about whom Rousseau had talked, he insisted that what was important was diversity, inequality, conflict of interests – those were the normal conditions of individuals and of nations. He denied all meaning to such abstractions as Nature, Man, Natural Rights. His doctrine of language contradicted everything which Condorcet and Condillac and all the great scientists of the eighteenth century had tried to formulate. He tried to breathe new life into the discredited doctrine of the Divine Right of Kings. He defended the importance of mystery, of darkness, almost of ignorance, and above all of irrationality, as the basis of social and political life. With immense effectiveness and brilliance he denounced every form of lucidity, every form of rationality. Temperamentally Maistre was as ruthless and as extreme as his great enemies, the Jacobins; and he had something of their faith and their integrity.

Alexander Herzen, the Russian revolutionary, remarks that what distinguished the men of 1792 was the wonderful completeness of their rejection of the entire old order. He says that they denounced not merely its vices, but all its virtues too. They wished to leave nothing standing, they wanted to destroy the entire evil system, root and branch, in order to build up something absolutely fresh, entirely pure. They wanted to make no compromise; they wanted to have no debt to that upon whose ruins their new cities would be raised. Maistre was the exact inverse of this. He attacked eighteenth-century rationalism with the intolerance and the passion and the power and the gusto of the great revolutionaries themselves. He wanted to destroy what has been so well called ‘the heavenly city of the eighteenth-century philosophers’.<sup>8</sup> He wanted to raze it to the ground, not leaving stone upon stone.

The method which he used, as well as the truths which he preached, although he officially said he derived them from Thomas à Kempis or Thomas Aquinas, or the great preachers of the seventeenth century in France, Bourdaloue or Bossuet, in fact displays very little of the spirit of these great pillars of the Church. They had far more to do with the anti-rationalist approach of someone like

<sup>8</sup> The title of a book (New Haven, 1932) by Carl L. Becker.

Augustine, or with the Freemasons and the illuminists among whom Maistre's youth was spent.

#### IV

Maistre's fundamental doctrine is this: nature is red in tooth and claw, it is a vast scene of carnage and destruction. The men of the eighteenth century turn to metaphysics, to logic, even to geometry, in order to find out what nature is like. Those are not the sources of our knowledge of nature. If they want to talk about nature, let them be serious. They speak about using observation as a weapon, using our eyes, not accepting a great many dogmatic truths merely because a lot of preachers have spoken to us about them. Very well, then, they must be taken at their word. Let us look at what is going on round us, Maistre says, let us not look at books, let us look at nature, at ourselves, let us study history, yes, and zoology. They are the true guides to nature. What do we see if this is where we look? Let me quote what Maistre says:

In the vast domain of living nature there reigns an open violence, a kind of prescriptive fury which arms all the creatures to their common doom. As soon as you leave the inanimate kingdom, you find the decree of violent death inscribed on the very frontiers of life. You feel it already in the vegetable kingdom: from the vast catalpa to the humblest herb, how many plants *die*, and how many are *killed*! But from the moment you enter the animal kingdom, this law is suddenly in the most dreadful evidence. A violent power, at once hidden and palpable . . . has in each major subdivision of the animals appointed a certain number of species to devour the others. Thus there are insects of prey, reptiles of prey, birds of prey, fishes of prey, quadrupeds of prey. There is no instant of time when one creature is not being devoured by another. Over all these numerous races of animals man is placed, and his destructive hand spares nothing that lives.

The passage which follows is more effective in French. It is a curious litany:

il tue pour se nourrir, il tue pour se vêtir, il tue pour se parer, il tue pour attaquer, il tue pour se défendre, il tue pour s'instruire, il tue pour s'amuser, il tue pour tuer: roi superbe et terrible, il a besoin de tout, et rien ne lui résiste . . . à l'agneau [il demande]

ses entrailles pour faire résonner une harpe . . . au loup sa dent la plus meurtrière pour polir les ouvrages légers de l'art, à l'éléphant ses défenses pour façonner le jouet d'un enfant: ses tables sont couvertes de cadavres . . . Cependant quel être [dans le carnage permanent] exterminera celui qui les extermine tous? Lui. C'est l'homme qui est chargé d'égorger l'homme . . . Ainsi s'accomplit . . . la grande loi de la destruction violente des êtres vivants. La terre entière, continuellement imbibée de sang, n'est qu'un autel immense où tout ce qui vit doit être immolé sans fin, sans mesure, sans relâche, jusqu'à la consommation des choses, jusqu'à l'extinction du mal, jusqu'à la mort de la mort.

Let me translate this:

Man kills to obtain food and kills to clothe himself. He kills to adorn himself and he kills in order to attack. He kills in order to defend himself and he kills in order to instruct himself. He kills to amuse himself and he kills in order to kill. Proud and terrible king, he wants everything and nothing can resist him . . . From the lamb he demands its guts to make his harp resound . . . from the wolf his deadliest tooth to polish his trifling works of art, from the elephant his tusks to make a toy for his child: his tables he covers with corpses . . . But who [in the general carnage] will exterminate the one who exterminates all the others? He will himself. It is man who is charged with the slaughter of men . . . Thus is accomplished . . . the great law of the violent destruction of living creatures. The whole earth, perpetually steeped in blood, is nothing but a vast altar, upon which all that is living must be sacrificed without end, without measure, without pause, until the consummation of things, until evil is extinct, until the death of death.<sup>9</sup>

And yet, says Maistre, man is born to love. He is tender and gentle and good. Whence comes his divine fury? Is it the earth calling for blood? Why is it, asks Maistre, that troops in battle never, or very seldom, mutiny against the instructions of their commanders, who tell them to exterminate other innocent men? Is there not something paradoxical in the fact that soldiers – innocent, honourable men, whom we receive with the greatest courtesy in private life, and who in ordinary life are gentle, virtuous, God-fearing, polite persons, who

<sup>9</sup> References for quotations from Maistre are by volume and page to *Oeuvres complètes de J. de Maistre*, 14 vols. (Lyon, 1884–7), thus: v, 22–5, the reference for this quotation.

would not hurt a fly – go into battle in order to kill other soldiers, as innocent as themselves, without any demur? Whereas the executioner, who is the man, after all, who, under instruction, kills people who on the whole are presumably not innocent – parricides, murderers and other criminals – and kills many fewer of them than the soldiers do, is nevertheless regarded as a social outcast; nobody shakes him by the hand; he is regarded with horror and loathing, not as an ordinary member of society. Is there not something strange in admiring the shedding of innocent blood, and recoiling before the shedding of guilty blood? It must be, says Maistre, because war is in some sense divine in itself, because it is the law of the world. This is a central doctrine in Maistre: that rationalist notions do not work. If you really want to know why people behave as they do, you must seek the answer in the realm of the irrational. This is a kind of mysticism which puts its faith in the other world, not in this one.

V

Maistre is fascinated by the spectacle of war. Consider, he says, a battlefield. People imagine that a battlefield is a place where things happen in a planned manner. The commander gives orders, the troops march into battle, and battles are won or lost in accordance with the preponderance of troops, or the skilful instructions issued by the generals. Nothing could be less true. Consider an actual battle. Once more, do not look at the textbook, look at life: zoology and history are Maistre's masters. If you find a battlefield, what you will encounter upon it is not at all an orderly procession of events matching the descriptions of eye-witnesses, or even of strategists, of tacticians or historians. What you will find is appalling noise, confusion, slaughter, death, ruin, the shrieks of the wounded, the groans of the dying, the violent firing of firearms. 'Five or six kinds of intoxication' (v, 34) possess people upon the field; a general cannot possibly tell whether he is losing the battle or winning it. Nobody can possibly tell this. Wars are not won by rational calculation, they are won by moral force. They are won by people who feel they are winning them. They are won by some kind of irrational inner certainty. You cannot, in the moment of battle, calculate whether your troops are still more numerous upon the field of battle than the enemy's. It is not like a duel between two human beings, where the strength of one is obvi-

ously greater or obviously smaller than the strength of the other. Battles are won psychologically, battles are won by acts of faith. Above all, what happens happens as a result of some kind of mysterious inner force which is certainly not rational calculation or the careful application of a textbook set of rules, some kind of elaborate rational calculation or plan which wins or loses battles.

Tolstoy, when describing the Battle of Borodino in *War and Peace*, carefully followed this account of Maistre's. Tolstoy read Maistre because Maistre lived in Petersburg during the period in which he was interested, and he echoes his description of what a real battle is like, describing the experience of people present at the battle rather than giving the orderly, tidied-up account constructed later by eyewitnesses or historians. For both Maistre and Tolstoy, too, life itself is a battle of this sort, and any attempt to describe it in rational terms is really a kind of dreadful distortion, a smoothing over, tidying up, ordering of something which is by nature deeply irrational, deeply untidy, and obeys no discoverable laws or rules.

## VI

Maistre protests above all against the assumption that reason is the great mistress of things. It is impossible to govern men or achieve anything by means of reason. He says: What do you think reason is to me? Reason is simply a feeble faculty in men for the purpose, now and then, of fitting means to ends. You really think that the great institutions of mankind are rational constructions? Remember that the business of an institution is to be authoritative. The business of government is to govern. Every human society must have a government, and every government must have this sovereignty. Every sovereignty must contain within it a principle of infallibility, and the only thing that is absolutely infallible is the word of God. Anything which human beings make, human beings can mar. Anything which human beings can construct, human beings can destroy. Suppose you create an artificial institution, a republic or a limited constitutional monarchy, by means of that reason which the eighteenth century recommended – say some utilitarian arrangement for the securing of the greatest happiness or the greatest freedom of the greatest number. Well, clever men construct that in one generation, and still cleverer men in the next generation can puncture it full of holes, can com-

pletely destroy it by means of their superior, their still subtler, still cleverer, still more destructive reasoning. Nothing can stand perpetually but what something other than reason builds up, for what reason builds up, reason will pull down.

Man is by nature vicious, wicked, cowardly and bad. What the Roman Church says, what Christianity says, about original guilt, original sin, is the truest psychological insight into human nature. Left alone, human beings will tear each other to pieces. Here Maistre is completely opposed to his time: he regards human beings, unless clamped with iron rings and held down by means of the most rigid discipline, as likely to destroy themselves. He regards human nature as fundamentally self-annihilating, and needing above all to be curbed and controlled. The only thing which is reliable, the only thing which is dependable, is not man-made; for if it is man-made it can equally be unmade by man.

What did the eighteenth century teach us about this? It taught us that society was founded upon a contract. But this is a logical as well as a historical absurdity. What is a contract? A contract is a promise. So we have a lot of rational persons coming together – says Maistre in a mocking manner – for the purpose of arranging a peaceful life which will give people rather more of worldly goods, or security, or happiness, or liberty, or whatever it is they may happen to want, than they would get in a so-called state of nature. And how do they do this? By constructing a State as one might a bank, or a limited-liability company. But even to do that requires that the promise, the social contract, be enforceable. If somebody breaks it there must be some kind of instrument for the purpose of forcing him back into conformity, or expelling him. But a body of men who already understand such concepts as promises, and the enforcement of promises, is a completely mature, sophisticated human society. The notion that barbarous creatures, wild aborigines from the woods, coming together for the first time in history in order to construct something called a social contract, are already furnished with such elaborate and sophisticated social notions as promises towards each other, obligation, duty, enforcement of promises, that they have all this ready to put into the intellectual pool, is a grotesque logical absurdity. People who are armed with the notion of a promise, the notion of respecting each other's will, the notion of punishment, the notion of reward, do not need a society, they are in it already. Quite clearly, therefore, society

is presupposed by the notion of a contract. Furthermore, it was not created by man, for if it had been created by man it would not have stood up to the ravages of centuries. It is something which lies in the deep darkness of antiquity; and for Maistre (here he is deeply influenced by Burke) anything which goes back to the mists of antiquity was made by God and not by man.

## VII

Similarly with language. M. Rousseau, he says, tells us that he wants to know about the origins of language. Well, of course M. Condillac, who can answer all questions, can answer this question too. How was language constructed? Why, of course, by the division of labour. A lot of rationalist persons, seeking their own personal advantage, cosily gathered together and proceeded to invent language, says Maistre. The first generation of men, presumably, said BA and the next generation of men said BE. The Assyrians invented the nominative, and the Medes invented the genitive (iv, 88). That is how grammar was made.

This kind of bitter irony is very appropriate. Maistre was one of the first to perceive that the whole eighteenth-century notion that human institutions are constructed by rational men for limited and intelligible purposes is totally untrue to human nature. Herder had had some such ideas already, and of course the German romantics had them too. Maistre employed a particularly biting and mordant irony for the purpose of dismantling the rickety structures of eighteenth-century theories about the origins of society, especially their peculiarly unhistorical approach. But his most savage onslaughts are directed against the notion of nature. M. Rousseau, he says, tells us that it is strange that man, who was born free, should be everywhere in chains: 'What does he mean? . . . This mad pronouncement, *Man is born free*, is the opposite of the truth' (ii, 338). Faguet encapsulates Maistre's response to Rousseau in a brilliant epigram: Rousseau's claim, he says, is as if one were to say how strange it is that sheep, who were born carnivorous, should nevertheless everywhere be nibbling grass.<sup>10</sup> Maistre mocks at the all-providing, all-explaining entity which is dignified by the name of Nature by the Encyclopaedists.

<sup>10</sup> 'Dire: les moutons sont nés carnivores, et partout ils mangent de l'herbe, serait aussi juste.' Faguet, *Politiques et moralistes* (see note 1 above), p. 41.



Who is this lady, he says, of whom one hears so much (IV, 132–3)? Nature, so far from being the beneficent provider of all good things, the source of all life and knowledge and happiness, is to him an eternal mystery; savage in her methods, the principal source of cruelty, pain, chaos; no doubt serving God's inscrutable purpose, but seldom the source of comfort or enlightenment.

Rousseau had preached a return to the simple virtues of the noble savage. What noble savage? Savages are, according to Maistre, not noble at all but sub-human, cruel, dissident and brutal. Anyone who has lived among them can testify that they are the refuse of mankind. So far from being the great uncorrupted prototypes, early exemplars of natural taste and natural morality, virtuous, high-minded, truthful, from which civilisation has perverted the nations of the West, they are merely the failures of God's creative process. It is true that Christian missionaries who have been sent among the Indians of America, for example, speak about them with kindness, but that is because they are good priests who cannot bring themselves to attribute to any of God's creatures the squalor and the vices in which all these people were in fact sunk. It does not follow from their testimony that the Indians are models for us to follow. The language of savages is not something with primitive strength, with the beauty of a beginning; it has only the confusion and the ugliness of decay.

As for the state of nature, which acts as a repository – for the thinkers of the eighteenth century – of the so-called rights of man which primitive man is supposed to be recognising, in whose name do these eighteenth-century speakers affect to speak? In the name of nature? There is no such lady, says Maistre, otherwise why have we never met her? What are these rights? Inherent in what men? No metaphysical magic eye will detect abstract entities called rights, not derived from either human or divine authority. As for the famous abstract Man in whose name the great revolution was started, in whose name the cruellest massacres were organised, in the name of whom innocents were slaughtered: 'In the course of my life,' says Maistre, 'I have seen Frenchmen, Italians, Russians . . . I know, too, thanks to Montesquieu, *that one can be a Persian*. But as for man, I declare that I have never met him in my life; if he exists, he is unknown to me' (I, 74).

In our day, says Maistre, what has happened as a result of faith in completely empty words and empty formulae is that 'the two anchors



of society – religion and slavery – having failed at one and the same moment, the ship was carried away by the storm, and was wrecked’ (VIII, 284). That is why, in his advice to the Russian Emperor, he was always saying: There are only two anchors upon which society rests, by which wicked man can be confined, protected from his blindly self-destructive impulses. One is the Church and the other is slavery. The Christian Church abolished slavery because she was powerful enough to keep man in fetters by herself, but if you in Russia, where the Orthodox Church is not very highly regarded by the populace, let serfdom go, if you, as your advisers tell you, liberate the serfs, why then your country will be plunged into the most vicious revolution. It will go from barbarism into anarchy. Nobody can want as violently as the Russians want, and once you allow all these ‘Pugachevs of the University’ (VIII, 291), as he calls them, all these intellectual rebels, all these economists and scientists and sophisters and magicians, to dominate you, your kingdom, which rests upon authority as all kingdoms must rest, upon faith in blind authority, will collapse.

## VIII

What is the principal notion of the eighteenth century? That society is in some sense founded upon recognition of reciprocal interests by people who want to live together as happily and as freely as possible. This is denied forcefully and passionately by Maistre. He says society is not founded upon this at all. Society is founded upon self-immolation. Why do soldiers march to battle? They do not know. If a king wishes to introduce something as harmless as a census or the alteration of a calendar, there are mutinies and riots among the population. But if there is a war, in which many innocent men will be slaughtered, and in which many hundreds of thousands will not come back to their wives and children, then people peacefully obey. Why, we cannot tell; it is irrational.

Maistre really makes two points here. One is that the cause of things cannot be fathomed by the mere feeble contrivance of men; the other, that the only things which last are irrational. For example, he says, take the institution of hereditary monarchy: what could be more irrational? Why should a wise king have an equally wise son, or indeed a son who was wise at all? Here is an institution of a

patently idiotic nature, for which no good reason can be given, and yet it lasts. It has lasted for many centuries, and upon it the foundations of the Western world are built. But far more rational, far more logical and reasonable, would be to abolish such a monarchy and see what happens. What happened to the unhereditary, elected monarchy in Poland? There chaos and ruin followed almost immediately. Why? Because a rational system had been adopted. Take the institution of marriage. What could be more irrational than that two human beings, merely because they happen to love each other at one stage of their lives, should be together with each other for the rest of their lives, for no better reason than that this happened in the past? But nothing is more short-lived, nothing more destructive, nothing becomes so hateful as the regime of free love. So he goes on, from institution to institution, paradoxically asserting that whatever is irrational lasts, and that whatever is rational collapses; it collapses because anything which is constructed by reason can be pulverised by reason; anything which was built by the self-critical faculties cannot stand up to attack by them. The only thing which can ever dominate men is impenetrable mystery.

The eighteenth century thinks – and the seventeenth century thought, too – that there are certain social and political questions which can be answered in a certain fashion. Some think they can be answered by metaphysicians, others by scientists; some by the word of conscience, by looking into the heart, and others by reading the books of specific experts on these matters. Maistre says: Once you allow such a question to be put, the answer will demand the next question. The answer will never stand up, and people will question the answer, and the answer to that question in turn, and will go on asking for the why of the why of the why. The only way to get people to live in societies at all is to stop them from questioning, and the only way in which you can stop them from questioning is by terror. Only if the heart of things is dark and mysterious, impenetrable, will people obey. Once they have penetrated the heart of things, and once it is rational, once it is something which they can understand, they will not be afraid of it. They will not be in awe of it, they will not revere it, and so it will collapse. What we need, therefore, is something dark and unintelligible.

Take the problem of language, says Maistre. Language is identical with thought. The eighteenth century, which thought that language

was a human invention, was mistaken on this point. In order to invent you have to think, and in order to think you have to employ symbols; to say that language can be constructed is an absolute absurdity. M. Condorcet wants to have a scientific language which will be clear and intelligible, which can be spread among all the nations – a kind of scientific Esperanto. Nothing would be more disastrous. It would be disastrous precisely because it was clear, precisely because it was intelligible. Above all, clarity, intelligibility must be put out of court, must be stopped, because it is they which create unrest, criticism, questioning, which end, of course, in the overturning of ancient institutions, in injustice, blood, revolutions and chaos.

Latin is the language which we must teach our children. Why? Because it is unclear. People argue against prejudice, against superstition. What is prejudice? It is merely the beliefs of the centuries, tested by experience. History is, after all, the only teacher we have, and politics is only experimental history. Here Maistre talks rather like Burke, who defended prejudice in exactly the same way. Prejudice is simply the kind of skin which humanity has acquired in the course of centuries, traditionally, which has been tested against many diverse situations, and to throw it away is to remain trembling and naked before the destructive forces of life. Latin is a language of an irregular kind. Latin is a language whose grammar is not rational. It embodies all kinds of prejudices, all kinds of ancient superstitions, blind faith, unconscious experience, everything which science is against. That is why it is the language to which we must cling, for there are only two things which are ever good in the world – one is antiquity, and the other is irrationality. Only the combination of these two creates a force sufficiently powerful to resist the corrosive influence of the critics, the askers of questions, the scientists.

## IX

Against whom are we trying to preserve the social order? The enemies of the social order, whom Maistre calls 'la secte',<sup>11</sup> are a very interesting collection of men. They are, for him, Jansenists and Calvinists, and all Protestants in general; lawyers, metaphysicians, journalists,

<sup>11</sup> For example, I, 407, VIII, 91, 222, 223, 268, 283, 311–12, 336, 345, 512–13.

writers, Jews, American revolutionaries, intellectuals, scientists, critics; in short, the intelligentsia, and everything which belongs to it. This list – of liberals, of all kinds of critics, of all kinds of people who believe in some kind of abstract truth, of people who do not accept the dogmatic premisses of society – was compiled almost for the first time by Maistre, and by now it is familiar. It has been the stock-in-trade of every violently reactionary movement of our day.

But of all these Maistre hates scientists the most. They are the people who have the least capacity for understanding life, and for government, and he warned the Tsar of Russia, in extremely solemn tones, not to commit the fatal blunder of allowing the arts and the sciences to dominate the country. He says: Take the greatest nation that ever was, at any rate the greatest in the art of government, the Romans. They knew very well that they would merely make fools of themselves as scientists. They hired Greeks because they knew they would merely be undignified if they tried to do the job themselves. No great statesman, he says, from Suger to Richelieu, was ever a scientist, or knew anything about science. There is something about science, about its dry, abstract, unconcrete nature, something about the fact that it is divorced from the crooked, the chaotic, the irrational texture of life with all its darkness, which makes scientists incapable of adapting themselves to the actual facts, and anyone who listens to them is automatically doomed. He says to the Emperor of Russia: Do not allow all these Lutheran Germans to come and teach in your schools. Who are these people who are pouring in, in endless numbers, into your kingdom? Good men – family men, men who have traditions, faith, religion, respectable morals – do not leave their countries. Only the feckless and the restless and the critical do so. This is the first real sermon against refugees, against freedom of the spirit, against the circulation of humanity – the first, certainly, made in violent and intelligible and, indeed, memorable terms.

What then does society rest upon? Society is part of the vale of tears where we cannot understand the sources of things, where God governs us in an inscrutable way. It rests upon terror; it rests upon obedience, blind obedience to authority. Without it institutions become chaotic and restless, and go down in a welter of disaster. What represents this element of terror? Here Maistre makes a most paradoxical observation, and writes the most famous page in all his

writings. He says that the person who stands in the centre of it all is none other than that hated figure, the executioner. Let me quote the famous passage in which he speaks of him:

Who is this inexplicable being? . . . He is like a world in himself . . . Hardly has he been assigned to his proper dwelling-place . . . when others remove their homes elsewhere . . . In the midst of this desolation . . . he lives alone with his mate and his young, who acquaint him with the sound of the human voice. But for them he would hear nothing but shrieks of agony . . . One of the lowest menials of justice knocks at his door and tells him that his services are wanted. He goes. He arrives in a public square where people are crowded together with faces of expectancy. A prisoner, a parricide, a man who has committed a sacrilege is flung to his feet. He seizes the man, stretches him, ties him to a cross which is lying on the ground, raises his arms, and there is a terrible silence. It is broken only by the sound of the crushing of bones under the blows of the iron mace, and the screams of the victim. He unbinds the man, he carries him to the wheel; the broken limbs are twined round the spokes and the head hangs down; the hair stands on end and from the mouth – open like the door of a glowing furnace – there come at intervals only a few broken syllables of entreaty for death. The executioner has finished his task; his heart is beating, but it is with pleasure; he is satisfied with his work. He says in his heart, ‘No man breaks on the wheel better than I.’ He comes down from the scaffold and holds out his bloody hand, into which, from a distance, an official flings a few gold pieces. The executioner carries them off between two rows of human beings who shrink from him with horror. He sits down to table and eats, he goes to bed and sleeps, but when he awakes next morning his thoughts run on everything but his occupation of the day before. Is he a man? Yes, God allows him to enter his shrines and accepts his prayers. He is no criminal, and yet no human language dares to call him, for instance, virtuous, honourable or estimable . . . Nevertheless all greatness, all power, all social order depends upon the executioner; he is the terror of human society and the tie that holds it together. Take away this incomprehensible force from the world, and at that very moment order is superseded by chaos, thrones fall, society disappears. God, who is the source of the power of the ruler, is also the source of punishment. He has suspended our world upon these two poles, ‘for the Lord is the lord of the

twin poles, and round them he sets the world revolving'. (iv, 32-3)

This is not a mere sadistic meditation about crime and punishment. Lamennais said of Maistre that it is strange how a man who is so noble should have only two realities in his whole life: crime and punishment. 'It is as if all his works were written from the scaffold.'<sup>12</sup> But my quotation from Maistre is not merely cruel. It is the expression of a genuine conviction, coherent with all the rest of Maistre's passionate but very lucid thought, that men can only be saved by being hemmed in by the terror of authority. They must be reminded at every instant of their lives of the frightening mystery that lies at the heart of creation; must be purged by perpetual suffering, must be humbled by being made conscious of their stupidity, malice, helplessness at every turn. War, torture, suffering are the inescapable human lot.

Man is a fool; man is a child; man is a lunatic; man is an absentee landlord; life is – ought to be – a kind of penal settlement with guardians to look after this creature. He must be controlled by appointed masters – people who are imbued with a duty which has been laid upon them by their maker, who made nature a hierarchy – by the ruthless imposition of rules, and the ruthless extermination of the enemy. The enemy, as we have seen, is 'la secte', the disturbers, the subverters, the secular reformers, the intellectuals, the idealists, the lawyers, the perfectibilians, the people who believe in conscience, or equality, or the rational organisation of society, the liberators, the revolutionaries – these are the people who must be rooted out.

## X

There is something very extraordinary about a man who, in the most lucid possible manner, speaking a language which is certainly as clear and as beautiful as that used by anybody in the eighteenth century, says things which are the precise opposite of the general tenor of that century. Yet Maistre is also in a sense a child of the century, precisely because of the extraordinary contrariety with which he meets every single thing that the century says. Saint-Simon believed that there

<sup>12</sup> Letter of 8 October 1834 to the Comtesse de Senfft: Félicité de Lamennais, *Correspondance générale*, ed. Louis le Guillou (Paris, 1971-81), vol. vi, letter 2338, p. 307.

was something in common between Maistre and the people whom he most particularly disliked, the followers of Voltaire – indeed, even Voltaire himself. Voltaire was the enemy, and Maistre talks with immense hatred about the perpetual hideous grin of this dreadful monster. Yet Saint-Simon says that perhaps the future of human society lies in the combination of Maistre and Voltaire.

At first this is a wild paradox. How can there be such a combination? Voltaire stands for individual liberty and Maistre for chains. Voltaire cries for more light and Maistre for more darkness. Voltaire hated the Church so violently he denied it even the minimum of virtue; Maistre liked even its vices and regarded Voltaire as the Devil incarnate. Yet there is something in what Saint-Simon says, very odd as it may seem, because, although they are polar opposites, both Voltaire and Maistre belong to the hard, cold, dry, lucid, tough-minded tradition of French thought. Their ideas may appear strictly to contradict one another, but the quality of mind is often exceedingly similar. Neither is guilty of any degree of softness or vagueness or self-indulgence, nor do they tolerate these qualities in others. They stand for the dry against the moist, so to speak; they are implacably opposed to everything which is turbid and misty, romantic, gushing, impressionistic. Both of them are equally opposed to the spirit of Rousseau, Chateaubriand, Victor Hugo, Michelet, Renan, Bergson. They are ruthless and deflationary writers; they are heartless and, at times, genuinely cynical. Beside this cold, clear, glossy surface even Stendhal's prose – and Stendhal borrowed a great deal from Maistre – seems romantic. Marx, Tolstoy, Sorel, Lenin – they are their true successors.

This tendency to cast a cold look upon the political scene, to deflate and to dehydrate, to submit politics and history to a genuinely ruthless as opposed to a merely shocking analysis – this is what has entered modern political techniques to a great degree, and it has entered them equally from just such ideas as those of Voltaire and of Maistre. The violently deflationary atmosphere of Voltaire was responsible for the exposure of sentimental popular values. Maistre stresses historicism and political pragmatism, and has a low estimate of human capacity and goodness, plus a belief that the essence of life is the craving for suffering and sacrifice and surrender. If you add to this Maistre's belief that government is impossible without repression of the weak majority by a minority of dedicated rulers, hardened against



all temptation to indulge in any kind of humanitarianism, we are gradually approaching modern totalitarianism. Voltaire can be made to strip away the liberal delusion, Maistre to provide the nostrum by which the bleak, bare world which results can be subdued. True, Voltaire did not like either despotism or deception; and Maistre recognised the need for both. 'The principle of the sovereignty of the people', says Maistre, 'is so dangerous that, even if it were true, it would be necessary to conceal it' (IX, 494). So what Saint-Simon said was not so paradoxical after all. The combination of the two leads to the ruthless totalitarianism, whether of the right or of the left, of the twentieth century.

What really fascinates Maistre is power. Power, for him, is divine. It is the source of all life, of all action. It is the paramount factor in the development of mankind, and whoever knows how to wield it acquires the right to use it; it is by that token the instrument chosen by God, at that particular moment, to work his mysterious purpose. To recognise power where it truly lies – in ancient, established, socially created institutions, not made by the hand of man – is political and moral insight and wisdom. All usurpation must fail in the end, because it flouts the divine laws of the universe. Permanent power, therefore, resides only in him who is the instrument of such laws. To resist power is criminal childishness and folly, directed against the human future.

Maistre preached the doctrine that all events must be studied empirically if we are to understand the workings of the divine will. His stoicism and relativism, his interest in nature and the distribution of power over human beings – these constitute Maistre's deeply considered view, and that is why, strangely, he approved of the Jacobins, which did not make him any more popular in *émigré* circles. Maistre said: when there is a vacuum, somebody must enter it. The King failed dismally. King Louis XVI and his miserable liberal advisers, and still more miserable Girondin reformers, were simply human dust, weak, optimistic, reformist, with no understanding of human nature, obviously the ruiners and subverters of society. Then, at a moment of vacuum, the Jacobins did at least do something. At least they killed somebody. They set up guillotines; they performed executions; they let blood flow. That Maistre approved of, because it was an exercise of power, because it held society together, because it made things cohere. He believed in sovereignty. Of course the Jac-



obins were the scourge of God, sent to punish a godless generation for betraying the faith of their fathers. But still, it is better to do what the Jacobins did and hold France together and make it a powerful kingdom and resist the enemy and crush the opposition of the feeble Prussians or the feeble Austrians – better than a lot of intellectual jabbering.

Similarly, Napoleon was the Corsican monster, of course; he was a fearful usurper, and one must not recognise him. Yet he was a powerful monarch, and power always comes from God, and certainly his title to his throne is no worse than that of Elizabeth of England or William of Orange or the House of Hanover. Maistre was fascinated by Napoleon, just as Napoleon was rather fascinated by Maistre, and each wished to meet the other, except that the King of Sardinia was, of course, horrified by any such idea. He was a pensionary of both England and Russia and a victim of Napoleon, and the thought of one of his diplomats meeting the destroyer of mankind plunged the court of Sardinia into absolute terror. Maistre replied with distinct sadness, saying that of course he would not meet Napoleon if the King did not wish him to, but nevertheless he thought this a wrong and short-sighted policy. He said: I see that you regard my proposal as very surprising. Well, I shall serve you to the end of my days, for I believe that the throne is more important than its occupant. As for not surprising you – I cannot promise that.

Maistre stresses tradition, the past, the unconscious, dark forces, not the amiable imaginary attributes of the folk soul, as did its enthusiastic champions – the German romantics – or the champions of the simple life (which he too always praised). On the contrary, he stresses the stability, the permanence and the impregnability of the authority that belongs to the dark mass of half-conscious memories and traditions and loyalties, and the power of institutions in exacting obedience, especially in regard to the supernatural. He lays great emphasis on the fact that absolute rule succeeds only when it is terrifying, and he fears and detests science, precisely because it pours too much light, and so dissolves the mystery, the darkness, which alone resists sceptical enquiry.

In a sense, then, Maistre is a kind of protagonist of the militant anti-rational Fascism of modern times, and that is what makes him so interesting. Behind the classical mask, behind the classical façade, behind the air of the Grand Seigneur, behind the orthodox Thomism,

behind the official complete subservience to the monarchy of his day, which was nothing very splendid or impressive, there is in Maistre something much wilder, much more romantic, much more terrifying. He reminds one of someone like d'Annunzio or Nietzsche – not to seek for later examples. In that way he resembled Rousseau. Just as Rousseau imposed a kind of Calvinist logical strait-jacket upon what was really a kind of burning private lunacy, so Maistre imposes an official legitimist Catholic framework upon what is really a deeply violent, deeply revolutionary inner passion.

What made Maistre so fascinating to those of his own generation was that he forced them to look at the seamy side of things. He forced them out of bland optimism; out of mechanical psychology; out of all the smooth ideals of the eighteenth century, which had suffered such a crushing disaster in the French Revolution. At the end of positivist, optimistic periods of human construction, in which men rise up and say they are about to cure all the world's ills by some economic or social solution, which then does not work, there is always a penchant for reaction on the part of ordinary people, satiated by so much false optimism, so much pragmatism, so much positive idealism, which become discredited by the sheer pricking of the bubble, by the fact that all the slogans turn out to be meaningless and weak when the wolf really comes to the door. Always, after this, people want to look at the seamy side of things, and in our day the more terrifying sides of psychoanalysis, the more brutal and violent aspects of Marxism, are due to this human craving for the seamy side – something more astringent, more real, more genuine, meeting people's needs in some more effective fashion than the rosy, over-mechanical, over-schematised faiths of the past. This is what Maistre provides for his own generation, too. Men cannot live by the ideals he opposed, and Maistre's contribution is a violent antidote to the over-blown, over-optimistic and altogether too superficial social doctrines of the eighteenth century. Maistre earns our gratitude as a prophet of the most violent, the most destructive forces which have threatened and still threaten the liberty and the ideals of normal human beings.

Men may be divided into those who are in favour of life and those who, on the whole, are against it. Among those who are against it there are sensitive and wise and penetrating people who are too offended and discouraged by the shapelessness of spontaneity, by the

lack of order among human beings who wish to live their own lives, not in obedience to any common pattern. Among such was Maistre. On the whole he has no positive doctrine, and if he has to choose between liberty and death he rejects liberty. He has his disciples in our century – Charles Maurras, for example, and Ezra Pound – and although we may disagree with such persons, let us remember that liberty needs its critics as well as its supporters. After all, as in Goethe's *Faust*, Mephistopheles, who criticised the ways of God, is not left altogether without an answer.

## Chronology

- 1753 Joseph de Maistre born at Chambéry, Savoy.  
1769 Sent to Turin for his legal education.  
1772 Begins legal career in the Senate of Savoy in Chambéry.  
1773-92 Membership in Masonic lodges in Chambéry.  
1775 Publishes an *Eloge de Victor-Amédée III*  
1777 Delivers a 'Discours sur la vertu' to the Senate (unpublished until 1896).  
1782 Writes 'Mémoire au Duc de Brunswick' on Freemasonry (unpublished until 1925).  
1784 Delivers a 'Discours sur le caractère extérieur du magistrat' to the Senate (unpublished until 1884).  
1786 Marriage to Françoise-Marguerite de Morand.  
1787? Writes an untitled manuscript dialogue that critiques natural law arguments for freedom of the press (unpublished until 1983).  
1787 Birth of daughter Adèle.  
1788 Writes memoirs on venality of office and the French parlements (unpublished until 1895). Named a senator.  
1789 Death of Maistre's father. Birth of son Rodolphe.  
1792 French invasion of Savoy. Maistre flees to Piedmont.  
1793 Maistre returns to Chambéry (Jan-Feb.). Following birth of daughter Constance, Maistre departs for Switzerland, where he settles in Lausanne.  
Publishes 'Adresse de quelques parents des militaires savoisiens' and *Lettres d'un royaliste savoisien à ses compatriotes* (counter-revolutionary pamphlets).

- Named Sardinian 'Correspondant' in Lausanne.
- 1794 Publishes 'Discours à la marquise de Costa' (first exposition of Maistre's providential interpretation of the French Revolution).
- 1794-95 Writes manuscripts entitled 'De la Souveraineté du Peuple' and 'De l'état de nature', refutations of Rousseau (unpublished until 1870).
- 1795 Publishes 'Jean-Claude Têtu (Adresse du maire de Montagnole à ses concitoyens)', another counter-revolutionary pamphlet. Writes 'Cinq paradoxes à Madame la marquise de Nav . . .' (unpublished until 1851). Writes a 'Mémoire sur la réunion de la Savoie au corps helvétique' (unpublished until 1961).
- 1796 Publishes 'Mémoire sur les prétendus émigrés savoisiens'. Writes *Considérations sur la France*.
- 1797 *Considérations sur la France* published anonymously. Recalled to Turin, but denied any official post after his authorship of the *Considérations* becomes public knowledge.
- 1798 Writes 'Réflexions sur le protestantisme et la souveraineté' (unpublished until 1870).
- 1799 Takes refuge in Venice. Writes 'Discours du citoyen Cherchemot' (a burlesque on revolutionary cant, unpublished until 1884) and an 'Essai sur les planètes' (never published).
- 1800-3 Serves as regent (chief judicial officer) of the island of Sardinia.
- 1803-17 Serves as Sardinian ambassador to the court of Tsar Alexander in St Petersburg.
- 1809 Writes *Essai sur le principe générateur des constitutions politiques et des autres institutions humaines*. Begins composition of the *Soirées de Saint-Petersbourg*.
- 1810 Writes 'Cinq lettres sur l'éducation publique en Russie' (unpublished until 1851).
- 1811 Writes 'Mémoire sur la liberté de l'enseignement public' (unpublished until 1884) and 'Quatre chapitres sur la Russie' (unpublished until 1859).
- 1814 Publishes *Essai sur le principe générateur . . .* New edition of *Considérations sur la France* published in Paris.

## Chronology

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- 1814-16 Writes *Examen de la philosophie de Bacon* (unpublished until 1836).
- 1815 Writes *Lettres sur l'inquisition espagnole* (unpublished until 1822).
- 1816 Publishes a translation of an essay from Plutarch's *Moralia* under the title *Sur les Delais de la justice divine*.
- 1817 Recalled to Turin.
- 1819 Publishes *Du Pape*.
- 1821 Maistre dies on 26 February. Later in the year, publication of *Les Soirées de Saint-Pétersbourg* and *De l'église gallicane*.

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- Correspondance diplomatique, 1811–1817*. Ed. A. Blanc. Paris: Librairie Nouvelle, 1860.
- Oeuvres complètes*, 14 vols. Lyon: Vitte, 1884–7.
- Joseph de Maistre et Blacas: leur correspondance inédite et l'histoire de leur amitié, 1804–1820*. Introduction, notes and commentary by E. Daudet. Paris: Plan-Nourit, 1908.
- Les Carnets du Comte Joseph de Maistre: Livre Journal 1790–1817*. Published by X. de Maistre. Lyon: Vitte, 1923.
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## Note on the text

The initial version of Richard Lebrun's translation, which was published by McGill-Queen's University Press in 1974, was made from the critical French edition of R. de Johannot and F. Vermale (Paris: Vrin, 1936). This new version, which has some slight revisions and a few additions, takes advantage of the improved critical edition prepared by Jean-Louis Darcel (Geneva: Slatkine, 1984). The editors of both critical editions had access to Joseph de Maistre's manuscript and to his own corrected copies of editions published during his lifetime. Borrowings from the new critical edition are indicated by the notation 'Darcel ed.'

The critical French editions include material Maistre had struck out of his original manuscript. Where this material seemed to facilitate understanding of Maistre's thought it has been included in the footnotes. All Maistre's footnotes are reproduced, but with his Latin and Italian citations given in English translation. Latin quotations in the text have been allowed to stand, but English translations are provided in the notes. All material added by the translator is distinguished by being enclosed in brackets. Persons, events, and references that might not be familiar to the modern reader have been identified.

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CONSIDERATIONS ON FRANCE

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## CHAPTER ONE

### Of Revolutions

We are all attached to the throne of the Supreme Being by a supple chain that restrains us without enslaving us. Nothing is more admirable in the universal order of things than the action of free beings under the divine hand. Freely slaves, they act voluntarily and necessarily at the same time; they really do what they will, but without being able to disturb the general plans. Each of these beings occupies the centre of a sphere of activity whose diameter varies according to the will of the *Eternal Geometer*, who can extend, restrict, check, or direct the will without altering its nature.

In the works of man, everything is as wretched as their author; views are restricted, means rigid, motives inflexible, movements painful, and results monotonous. In divine works, the riches of infinity are openly displayed in the least part. Its power is exercised effortlessly; everything is supple in its hands, nothing resists it, and for it everything, even obstacles, are means; and the irregularities introduced by the operation of free agents fit into the general order.

If we imagine a watch all of whose springs vary continually in strength, weight, dimension, form, and position that nevertheless invariably keeps perfect time, we will form some idea of the action of free beings relative to the plans of the Creator.

In the political and moral world, as in the physical world, there is a usual order and there are exceptions to this order. Ordinarily, we see series of effects produced by the same causes; but in certain epochs, we see actions suspended, causes paralyzed, and new effects.

A *miracle* is an effect produced by a divine or superhuman cause that suspends or contradicts an ordinary cause. If in the middle of

winter, before a thousand witnesses, a man were to command that a tree be suddenly covered with leaves and fruit, and the tree obeyed, everyone would proclaim it a miracle and bow down before the wonder-worker. But the French Revolution and everything now happening in Europe is just as marvellous in its own way as the instantaneous fructification of a tree in the month of January. However, instead of being astonished, we look the other way or talk nonsense.

In the physical order, in which man does not play a role as a cause, he is quite willing to admire what he does not understand. But in the sphere of his own activity, where he feels that he is a free cause, man's pride easily leads him to see *disorder* wherever his action is suspended or disturbed. Certain measures that are in man's power regularly produce certain effects in the ordinary course of events; if he misses his mark, he knows why or believes he does. He knows the obstacles, he appreciates them, and nothing surprises him.

But in revolutionary periods, the chain that binds man is abruptly shortened; his action is diminished and his means deceive him. Then carried along by an unknown force, he frets against it, and instead of kissing the hand that clasps him, he disregards or insults it.

'I do not understand it at all' is the fashionable phrase. This is a sensible reaction if it leads to the first cause that is presently presenting so great a spectacle to men; it is stupidity if it expresses only vexation or sterile despondency. 'How then', they cry on every side, 'is it the guiltiest men in the universe who are winning? A hideous regicide succeeds as well as those who committed it could have hoped. All over Europe monarchy is benumbed. Its enemies find allies even on thrones!<sup>1</sup> Everything succeeds for the wicked!<sup>2</sup> The most gigantic projects are executed without difficulty on their side, while the good party fails ridiculously in everything it undertakes,<sup>3</sup> Public opinion persecutes fidelity all over Europe!<sup>4</sup> The foremost

<sup>1</sup> [Probably a reference to the Prussian and Spanish monarchs who concluded separate peace treaties with France in 1795.]

<sup>2</sup> [Perhaps refers to Bonaparte's Italian campaign of 1796.]

<sup>3</sup> [Probably an allusion to such royalist fiascos as the 1795 landing at Quiberon in Brittany. This affair, much like the 1961 Bay of Pigs episode in Cuba, saw the complete defeat of a British-supported *émigré* invasion when the invaders failed to win the support of the local population.]

<sup>4</sup> [Louis XVIII, Louis XVI's brother and the unacknowledged claimant to the French throne since the death of his nephew, Louis XVII in June 1795, was expelled from Verona by the Venetians in April 1796. Finding himself unwelcome in Austria, he finally found refuge in Blankenburg, in the Duchy of Brunswick. The Directory had

statesmen are invariably mistaken!<sup>5</sup> The greatest generals are humiliated! etc.’

Doubtless, for the first condition of an ordained revolution is that whatever could have prevented it does not exist and that nothing succeeds for those who wish to prevent it. But never is order more visible, never is Providence more palpable, than when superior action is substituted for that of man and it acts all alone. This is what we are seeing at the present moment.

The most striking thing about the French Revolution is this overwhelming force that bends every obstacle. It is a whirlwind carrying along like light straw everything that human force has opposed to it; no one has hindered its course with impunity. Purity of motives has been able to make resistance honourable, but no more, and this jealous force, proceeding straight toward its goal, rejects equally Charette, Dumouriez, and Drouet.<sup>6</sup>

It has been correctly pointed out that the French Revolution leads men more than men lead it. This observation is completely justified, and although it can be applied to all great revolutions more or less, it has never been more striking than it is in the present period.

The very rascals who appear to lead the Revolution are involved only as simple instruments, and as soon as they aspire to dominate it they fall ignobly. Those who established the Republic did it without wanting to and without knowing what they were doing. They were led to it by events; a prior design would not have succeeded.

Robespierre, Collot, or Barère never thought to establish the revolutionary government or the Reign of Terror;<sup>7</sup> they were led to it imperceptibly by circumstances, and the like will never be seen

requested the Swiss Confederation to expel the *émigrés*, and a number of German cities declared that they did not wish to receive them.]

<sup>5</sup> [Probably a reference to William Pitt, since 1793 the leader of the anti-French coalition.]

<sup>6</sup> [On 10 August 1792, the day the monarchy was overthrown, Charette had tried in vain to rescue Louis XVI from the Tuileries; later he gained fame as a Vendée chieftain. Dumouriez, who was minister of foreign affairs in March 1792, did his best to provoke war with the Austrians in the secret hope that war would rally the French in support of their king. Later, in March 1793, as commanding general of the Army of the North he made an unsuccessful attempt to use his army to overthrow the Jacobins. Drouet, who was the postmaster at Saint-Menéhould in June 1791, recognized the fleeing Louis XVI and was instrumental in his arrest at Varennes.]

<sup>7</sup> [Robespierre, Collot, and Barère were leading members of the Committee of Public Safety.]



again. These extremely mediocre men exercised over a guilty nation the most frightful despotism in history, and surely they were more surprised at their power than anyone else in the kingdom.<sup>8</sup>

But the very moment these detestable tyrants completed the measure of crime necessary to that phase of the Revolution, a breath overthrew them.<sup>9</sup> Their gigantic power, which had made France and Europe tremble, could not withstand the first attack; and as there could be nothing great, nothing august, in a completely criminal revolution, Providence willed that the first blow be struck by the Septembrists,<sup>10</sup> in order that justice itself would be debased.<sup>11</sup>

We are often astonished that the most mediocre men have been better judges of the French Revolution than men of first-rate talent, that they have believed in it completely while accomplished politicians have not believed in it at all. This is because this belief is one of the characteristics of the Revolution, because the Revolution could succeed only by the scope and power of the revolutionary spirit, or, if one may put it another way, by *faith* in the Revolution. Thus, untalented and ignorant men have very ably driven what they call the *revolutionary chariot*. They have dared everything without fear of counter-revolution; they have always gone ahead without looking

<sup>8</sup> [The original manuscript added, 'This despotism was a just punishment for a people who had desired liberty in a criminal manner and whose culpable efforts had led to the most frightful regicide.']

<sup>9</sup> [Allusion to the events of Thermidor and the fall of Robespierre and his close colleagues.]

<sup>10</sup> [Billaud-Varenne and Tallien, who had been ministers of the Commune of Paris at the time of the September massacres (1792), were among those who helped bring down Robespierre on 9 Thermidor.]

<sup>11</sup> For the same reason, honour was dishonoured. One journalist (in *le Républicain*) said with much wit and justice, 'I understand very well how they can depantheonize Marat, but I will never understand how they will be able to demaratize the Panthéon.' Someone complained of seeing Turenne's body forgotten in the corner of a *museum* next to an animal skeleton. What imprudence! It was enough to give rise to the idea of tossing his venerable remains into the Panthéon. [The Panthéon was built as the Church of St Geneviève in the decades before the Revolution. It was converted to a temple of fame (*pantheon* is Greek for a temple dedicated to all the gods) at the death of Mirabeau in 1791. It remains the place of entombment for France's national heroes. Marat, who was assassinated in July 1793, was interred in the Panthéon as a Jacobin martyr in 1794. By 1795 he had become a symbol of revolutionary excess, and his body was removed to a nearby cemetery. Turenne, one of Louis XVI's most famous generals, had been buried at Saint-Denis. When the royal tombs were pillaged in 1793, his remains were removed to the museum. The Directory decided to honour him, but he was never moved to the Panthéon. He was finally laid to rest in Les Invalides by Napoleon in 1800.]

back, and everything has succeeded for them because they were only the instruments of a force that knew more than they did. They made no mistakes in their revolutionary career for the same reason that Vaucanson's flutist never hit a false note.<sup>12</sup>

The revolutionary torrent took successively different directions, and it was only by following the course of the moment that the most conspicuous men in the Revolution acquired the kind of power and celebrity they were able to achieve. As soon as they wanted to oppose it, or even to stand aside by isolating themselves or by working too much for themselves, they disappeared from the scene.

Look at Mirabeau, who was so conspicuous in the Revolution; at bottom he was only *the king of the market hall*. By the crimes that he committed and the books that he wrote he seconded the popular movement. He placed himself behind a mass already put in motion and pushed it in the already determined direction; his power never extended any further. He shared with another hero of the Revolution<sup>13</sup> the power of agitating the multitude without being able to dominate it – which in political troubles amounts to the true stamp of mediocrity. Rebels less brilliant, and in effect more able and more powerful than he, used his influence for their own profit. He thundered in the tribune and he was their dupe.<sup>14</sup> He said in dying that if he had lived, he would 'have reassembled the scattered pieces of the monarchy', and yet, when in the moment of his greatest influence he wanted only a ministry, his underlings pushed him aside like a child.<sup>15</sup>

In short, the more one examines the apparently most active personages in the Revolution, the more one finds in them something passive and mechanical. We cannot repeat too often that men do not lead

<sup>12</sup> [Jacques de Vaucanson (1709–82), a famous inventor, first attracted attention with an elaborate mechanical flute player that he displayed in Paris in 1737.]

<sup>13</sup> [Lafayette.]

<sup>14</sup> [Like many modern politicians, Mirabeau used a group of 'ghost writers', who wrote many of the speeches that he delivered in the Constituent Assembly. Since some of these writers were men of talent, wealth, and ambition (the financier Clavière, for example, who collaborated with Mirabeau on speeches on financial matters), the question of who was duping whom remains open. See O. J. G. Welsh, *Mirabeau* (Port Washington, NY: Kennikat Press, 1968), pp. 211–12.]

<sup>15</sup> [In late 1790 and early 1791, Mirabeau sought to organize a ministry that would halt the course of the Revolution. His fellow deputies and the king distrusted him, and consequently his schemes were stillborn. He died of natural causes a short time later.]

the Revolution; it is the Revolution that uses men. They are right when they say *it goes all alone*. This phrase means that never has the Divinity shown itself so clearly in any human event. If the vilest instruments are employed, punishment is for the sake of regeneration.

## CHAPTER TWO

# Reflections on the Ways of Providence in the French Revolution

Every nation, like every individual, has received a mission that it must fulfil. France exercises over Europe a veritable magistracy that it would be useless to contest and that she has most culpably abused. In particular, she was at the head of the religious system, and not without reason was her king called *most Christian*; Bossuet was never able to say too much on this point. And so, since she has used her influence to contradict her vocation and demoralize Europe, we should not be surprised if she is brought back to her mission by terrible means.

It has been a long time since we have seen such frightful punishment inflicted on such a large number of guilty people. No doubt there are innocents among the unfortunate victims, but they are far fewer than is commonly imagined.

All those who laboured to free the people from their religious beliefs, all those who opposed the laws of property with metaphysical sophisms, all those who said 'Strike, so long as we win something', all those who counselled, approved, or favoured the use of violent measures against the king, etc., all these willed the Revolution, and all who willed it have very justly, even according to our limited insight, become its victims.

We groan to see illustrious scholars fall beneath Robespierre's axe. Humanly, we cannot be too sorry for them; but divine justice has not the least respect for geometers or physicists.<sup>1</sup> Too many French

<sup>1</sup> [Maistre's original manuscript names Bailly, a mathematician and astronomer who became mayor of Paris in the first phase of the Revolution, and Lavoisier, a famous

scholars were the principal authors of the Revolution, too many approved and gave their support so long as the Revolution, like Tarquinius' sceptre, struck down only the tallest heads.<sup>2</sup> Like so many others, they said, *It is impossible to make a great revolution without incurring misfortunes*. But when a philosopher justifies evil by the end in view, when he says in his heart, *Let there be a hundred thousand murders, provided we are free*, and Providence replies, *I accept your offer, but you must be included in the number*, where is the injustice? Would we judge otherwise in our own tribunals?

Details would be odious;<sup>3</sup> but there are few Frenchmen among those they call 'innocent victims of the Revolution' to whom their consciences could not say

Now see the sad fruits your faults produced,  
Feel the blows you have yourselves induced.<sup>4</sup>

Our ideas on good and evil, on innocence and guilt, are often affected by our prejudices. If two men fight each other with three-inch daggers, they are judged guilty and shameful; but if they use three-foot blades, the combat becomes an honourable contest. We brand someone who steals one centime from his friend's pocket; if he steals only his friend's wife, it is nothing. Brilliant crimes involving great or likeable qualities, especially when they are rewarded by success, are pardoned or even admired. But in the eyes of true justice, the criminal is blackened by his best qualities because his greatest crime is his abuse of talent.<sup>5</sup>

Every man has certain duties to fulfil, and the extent of his duties is relative to his civil position and the extent of his means. The same

physicist who became politically suspect because before the Revolution he had been a member of a tax-farming syndicate. Both were guillotined during the Terror.]

<sup>2</sup> [Tarquinius, an early Roman king, is supposed to have struck off the heads of the tallest poppies in his garden as an object lesson in how to bring about the submission of a rebellious city.]

<sup>3</sup> [Maistre's original manuscript included a long digression on Malesherbes, who as director of publications had allowed the publication of the *Encyclopédie* and who later defended Louis XVI at his trial before the National Convention in 1792, an act which later led to his arrest and death by guillotine. Maistre blamed Malesherbes for allowing the publication of the books produced by a detestable 'philosophic sect', but conceded that he had redeemed his honour by defending the king.]

<sup>4</sup> [Racine, *Iphigénie*, v, 2.]

<sup>5</sup> [The original manuscript continued, 'Voltaire, whom blind enthusiasts have placed in the Panthéon, is perhaps more guilty of the judgement of Divinity than Marat, for he may have made Marat, and he certainly did more evil than Marat.']

action on the part of two given men may be very far from being equally criminal. In the same way, an action that is only an error or a bit of madness on the part of an obscure man suddenly raised to unlimited power would be a crime if committed by a bishop, duke, or peer.<sup>6</sup>

And finally, there are actions that, though excusable, and even praiseworthy from a human point of view, are in essence infinitely criminal. If, for example, someone tells us, *I embraced the French Revolution in good faith, for pure love of liberty and country; I believed in my soul and conscience that it would lead to the reform of abuses and the public welfare*, we have nothing to say. But He who knows the hearts of men sees the guilty disposition; He discovers in a ridiculous misunderstanding, in a little rumpling of pride, in a base or criminal passion, the prime mover behind those resolutions that we would like to display as noble, and for Him the lie of hypocrisy grafted onto treason is an additional crime. But let us speak of the nation in general.

An assault against sovereignty is undoubtedly one of the greatest crimes that can be committed; none has more terrible consequences. If sovereignty rests on a single head and that head falls victim to the assault, the crime is augmented by atrocity. But if this sovereign had committed no crime meriting such an attack, if the guilty were armed against him by his very virtues, the crime becomes unspeakable. We recognize here the death of Louis XVI. But what is important to note is *that never has a greater crime had more accomplices*. Far fewer were involved in the death of Charles I, even though he merited some blame and reproach and Louis XVI did not. Nevertheless he was given proofs of the most devoted courageous concern; even the executioner, who was only obeying orders, dared not reveal his identity. In France, Louis XVI marched to his death surrounded by 60,000 armed men who had not a shot for *Santerre*;<sup>7</sup> not a voice was raised for the unfortunate monarch, and the provinces were as mute as the

<sup>6</sup> [Probably allusions to Talleyrand, who had been bishop of Autun, and to the duke of Orléans, a cousin of the king, who became known as Philippe Egalité for his role in the Revolution.]

<sup>7</sup> [Santerre had been the commander of the Paris National Guard since 10 August 1792. On 18 January 1793 (three days before the king's execution) he told the Convention, 'Everything is perfectly quiet; the sentence of the former king will be executed with the greatest array. There is presently a reserve of nearly five thousand men ready to march; there are cannons everywhere, but they are unnecessary. Tranquillity cannot be interrupted.']



capital. We would expose ourselves, they said. Frenchmen! If you find this a good reason, talk no more of your courage, or admit that you have used it very badly.

The indifference of the army was no less remarkable. Having betrayed Louis XVI, it served his executioners much better than it had served the king. There was not the slightest testimony of discontent.<sup>8</sup> In sum, never have a greater number of guilty people shared (with many gradations, to be sure) in a greater crime.

We must make another important observation, which is that every assault committed against sovereignty *in the name of the nation* is always more or less a national crime, for it is always more or less the fault of the nation if any number of rebels can put themselves in a position to commit a crime in its name. Thus, no doubt not all Frenchmen *willed* the death of Louis XVI; but the immense majority of the people, for more than two years, *willed* all the follies, all the injustices, all the outrages that led up to the catastrophe of 21 January.<sup>9</sup>

Now all national crimes against sovereignty are punished without delay and in a terrible manner; this is a law that has never suffered exception. A few days after Louis XVI's execution, someone wrote in the *Mercur universel*, 'Perhaps it was not necessary to go that far, but since our legislators have taken the initiative on their own responsibility, let us rally around them, appease all hatreds, and forget the matter.'<sup>10</sup> Very well, it was perhaps unnecessary to assassinate the king; but since the deed is done, do not mention it again and let us all be good friends. Madness! Shakespeare knew better when he said

The single and peculiar life is bound,  
With all the strength and armour of the mind,

<sup>8</sup> [This is not entirely correct. After Louis XVI's flight to Varennes, the Constituent Assembly prescribed a loyalty oath for the army. About 2,000 officers out of 9,500 on active duty refused to swear it.]

<sup>9</sup> [21 January 1793 was the date of Louis XVI's execution.]

<sup>10</sup> [*Moniteur universel*, 23 January 1793. Maistre cites the title incorrectly. The journal concluded its account of the king's execution with the following comments: 'But let us leave Louis under the shroud; henceforth he belongs to history. For a moral and sensitive man there is something hallowed about a victim of the law. Now all good citizens must turn their wishes, their talents, and their strength toward the future. Divisions have made enough trouble in France. All honest men must sense the need for unity, and those who do not feel its attraction have still more reason for desiring its existence. A few principles, a little effort, and a coalition fatal to the wicked will be consummated.']

To keep itself from noyance; but much more  
That spirit upon whose weal depend and rest  
The lives of many. The cease of majesty  
Dies not alone; but, like a gulf, doth draw  
What's near it with it.<sup>11</sup>

Every drop of Louis XVI's blood will cost torrents of French blood; four million Frenchmen perhaps will pay with their heads for this great national crime of an antireligious and antisocial insurrection crowned by a regicide.

Where are the first national guardsmen, the first soldiers, the first generals who swore an oath to the nation? Where are the chiefs, the idols of that first guilty assembly for which the epithet of *constituent* will be an eternal epigram? Where is Mirabeau? Where is Bailly with his 'wonderful day'?<sup>12</sup> Where is Thouret, who invented the phrase 'to expropriate'? Where is Osselin, who introduced the first law proscribing *émigrés*?<sup>13</sup> One could name by the thousands the active instruments of the Revolution who have died a violent death.

Here again we may admire order in disorder, for it is evident, if we reflect a bit, that the guiltiest revolutionaries could be felled only by the blows of their accomplices. If force alone had accomplished what they call the *counter-revolution* and restored the king to his throne, there would have been no way of rendering justice. For a sensitive man to have to judge the assassins of his father, his relatives, and his friends, or merely the usurper of his property, would be the greatest misfortune that could happen to him. Now this is precisely what would have happened if the counter-revolution had occurred as expected. The superior judges, by the very nature of things, would almost all have belonged to the injured caste, and justice, even if it merely punished, would have had an air of vengeance. Moreover, legitimate authority always retains a certain moderation in the punishment of crimes involving a multitude of accomplices. When five or six are put to death for the same crime it is a massacre; if punishment exceeds certain limits it becomes odious. In short, great crimes unfor-

<sup>11</sup> [*Hamlet*, Act 3, Scene 3.]

<sup>12</sup> [When the king was forced to come to Paris on 5 October 1789, Mayor Bailly greeted him with the following words (no irony intended, apparently): 'What a wonderful day, sire, on which the Parisians have Your Majesty and his family in their city.']

<sup>13</sup> [Except for Mirabeau, who died a natural death, these men, who were leading revolutionaries in the Constituent Assembly, were all guillotined during the Terror.]



tunately require great punishments, and the limits are easily exceeded when it is a question of crimes of lese majesty, and flattery becomes the executioner. Humanity still has not pardoned former French legislation for Damiens's horrible punishment.<sup>14</sup> So what could French magistrates have done with three or four hundred *Damienses* and all the monsters who are overrunning France?

Would the sacred sword of justice have fallen relentlessly like Robespierre's guillotine? Would all the executioners and all the artillery horses of the realm be summoned to Paris to quarter men? Would lead and pitch be melted in vast boilers to sprinkle on limbs torn by red-hot pincers? Moreover, how would the crimes be characterized? How would the penalties be measured? And above all, how would there be punishment without laws? You say *that some of the guiltiest would be chosen and all the rest would obtain pardon*. This is precisely what Providence did not want. Able to do all, Providence disregards these pardons produced by impotence to punish. The great purification must be accomplished and eyes must be opened; the metal of France, freed from its sour and impure dross, must emerge cleaner and more malleable into the hands of a future king. Doubtless, Providence does not have to punish in this life in order to be justified, but in our epoch, coming down to our level, Providence punishes like a human tribunal.

There have been nations literally condemned to death like guilty individuals, and we know why.<sup>15</sup> If it entered into God's designs to reveal His plans with respect to the French Revolution, we would read the chastisement of the French like the decree of a parlement. But what more would we know? Is the chastisement not obvious? Have we not seen France dishonoured by more than a hundred thousand murders? The entire soil of this beautiful realm covered with scaffolds? And this unfortunate land watered with the blood of its children through judicial massacres, while inhuman tyrants squandered still more abroad for the support of a cruel war waged for their own interests? Never has a bloodier despot played with men's lives

<sup>14</sup> 'All eyes were turned away from so dreadful a sight. Such was the first and last punishment among the Romans of a kind that disregards the love of humanity.' Livy, 1, 28, *de suppl. Mettii*. [Damiens, who made an unsuccessful attempt to assassinate Louis XV in 1757, was put to death in the manner prescribed for a regicide by being drawn and quartered. His execution lasted four hours.]

<sup>15</sup> Leviticus 18:21-30; Deuteronomy 18:9-14; 1 Kings 15:24; IV Kings 17:7-18; 21:2; Herodotus, bk. II, ch. 46, and Larcher's note on this passage.

with such insolence, and never has a passive people presented themselves more complaisantly to the butcher. Sword and fire, cold and thirst, privations, sufferings of every kinds – nothing slakes their taste for punishment; all who are assigned must play their parts, and no disobedience will be seen until the judgement is accomplished.<sup>16</sup>

And yet what interesting points to ponder in this cruel and disastrous war. We can pass by turns from sadness to admiration. Let us imagine ourselves at the most terrible moment of the Revolution. Suppose that under the government of the infernal committee the army by a sudden metamorphosis all at once became royalist. Suppose the army convoked its own primary assemblies and freely named its most enlightened and honourable men to trace out the route to be taken in this difficult situation. Finally, suppose that one of those elected by the army stood up and said, 'Brave and loyal warriors! There are circumstances where the sum total of human wisdom is reduced to choosing between different evils. Doubtless it is a hard thing to fight for the Committee of Public Safety. But to turn our arms against it would be even more fatal. The moment the army meddles in politics the state will be dissolved, and the enemies of France, profiting from this moment of dissolution, will invade and partition her. We must act, not for the present moment, but for the future; above all, we must maintain the integrity of France. All we can do is fight for the government, whatever it may be; for in this way, France, despite her internal discord, will preserve her military strength and her influence abroad. Taking things at their best, it is not for the government that we are fighting, but for France and the future king to whom we will deliver a greater empire, perhaps, than the Revolution found. So our duty is to overcome the repugnance that makes us hesitate. Perhaps our contemporaries will calumniate our conduct, but posterity will accord us justice.'

This man would have spoken like a great philosopher. Indeed, the army realized this chimerical hypothesis without knowing what it was doing. The terror on one side, immorality and extravagance on the other, have accomplished precisely what a consummate and almost

<sup>16</sup> [Maistre's manuscript continued, 'If this dreadful destruction of mankind and especially this mixture of the innocent falling with the guilty still frightens certain imaginations and appears to require explanation, one can try to say something; but one must nevertheless caution that there is no assured route for the man who immerses himself in the obscure paths of true metaphysics.']

prophetic wisdom would have ordered the army to do. When we think about it, we can see that once the revolutionary movement was established, only Jacobinism could have saved France and the monarchy.

The king has never had an ally, and although he was never so imprudent as to acknowledge the fact, it is evident enough that the coalition begrudged the integrity of France. So how was the coalition to be resisted? What supernatural means could confound the efforts of conspiring Europe? Only the infernal genius of Robespierre could accomplish this prodigy. The revolutionary government hardened the soul of France by tempering it in blood; the spirit of the soldiers was exasperated, and their strength was doubled by ferocious despair and contempt for life induced by rage. The horror of the scaffolds, driving citizens to the frontiers, nourished external force in the measure that the least internal resistance was annihilated. All life, all wealth, all power was in the hands of the revolutionary authority, and this monstrous power, drunk with blood and success, the most frightful phenomenon that has ever been seen and the like of which will never be seen again, was both a horrible chastisement for the French and the sole means of saving France.

What were the royalists asking for when they called for their imagined counter-revolution, that is to say, one made abruptly and by force? They requested, in fact, the conquest of France; they requested therefore her division, the annihilation of her influence, and the debasement of her king – which is to say, perhaps three centuries of massacres, the inevitable consequence of such an upset of equilibrium. But our descendants, who will worry very little about our sufferings and will dance on our graves, will laugh at our present ignorance; they will easily console themselves for the excesses that we have seen and that will have preserved the integrity of ‘the most beautiful realm after that of heaven’.<sup>17</sup>

All the monsters born of the Revolution have, apparently, laboured only for the monarchy. Thanks to them, the lustre of victories has won the admiration of the world and surrounded the French name with a glory that the crimes of the Revolution can never entirely eclipse; thanks to them, the king will reascend his throne with all his pomp and power, perhaps even with an increase of power. And who

<sup>17</sup> Grotius, *De Jure belli et pacis, Epist. ad Ludovicum XIII.*

knows whether, instead of miserably sacrificing some of his provinces to obtain the right to rule over the others, he might be restored with the pride of power that would enable him to give what he could withhold? Certainly less probable things have been seen to happen.

This same idea, that everything is happening for the advantage of the French monarchy, convinces me that any royalist revolution is impossible before peace is made, for the restoration of the throne would mean a sudden relaxation of the driving force of the state. The black magic working at the moment would disappear like mist before the sun. Kindness, clemency, justice, all the gentle and peaceful virtues, would suddenly reappear and would bring with them a general meekness of character, a certain cheerfulness entirely opposed to the sombre rigour of the revolutionary regime. No more requisitions, no more legalized thefts, no more violence. Would generals flying the white flag have condemned as *insurgents* the inhabitants of invaded countries who were merely defending themselves? And would these inhabitants have been ordered not to move under pain of being shot as rebels! These horrors, very useful to the future king, could not, however, be used by him. So he would have only *humane* means at his disposal. He would be on a par with his enemies, and what would happen in that moment of suspension that necessarily accompanies the transition from one regime to another? I do not know. I am quite aware that the great conquests of the French seem to put the integrity of the realm out of danger (I even believe I am touching here on the reason for these conquests). Nevertheless, it still appears more advantageous for France and the monarchy that the peace, and a glorious peace for the French, be made by the Republic, and that a profound peace protect the king from every kind of danger when he returns to the throne.<sup>18</sup>

On the other hand, it is apparent that violent revolution, far from curing the people, would confirm them in their errors and they would never forgive the power that snatched away their myths. Since the *people*, properly speaking, or the multitude, were needed by the rebels to overturn France, clearly they had, in general, to be spared, and the greatest burdens had to fall first on the wealthy class. So the weight of the usurping power must crush the people long enough to

<sup>18</sup> [At the time Maistre was writing, in late 1796 or early 1797, France had made peace with Prussia and Spain, but was still at war with England and Austria.]



disgust them. They have only seen the Revolution; they must feel it; they must, so to speak, savour its bitter consequences. Perhaps, at the moment I am writing, they have not yet had enough.

A reaction must always be equal to the action. So do not be so impatient, and do not imagine that the very duration of your misfortunes promises you a *counter-revolution* of which you have no idea. Calm your resentment, and above all, complain not of kings and ask not for other miracles than those that you see. What! You contend that foreign powers are fighting disinterestedly to restore the French monarchy, and with no hope of indemnity? But then you do not expect men to be human; you ask the impossible. You will say, perhaps, that you would consent to the dismemberment of France for the *restoration of order*, but do you know what *order*? This is what will be seen in ten years – perhaps more, perhaps less. Who gives you the right to bargain for the king, for the French monarchy, and for your posterity? When blind rebels decree the indivisibility of the Republic, see only Providence decreeing that of the realm.<sup>19</sup>

Now let us take a look at the extraordinary persecution stirred up against the national religion and its ministers; this is one of the Revolution's most interesting *faces*.

No one would deny that the priesthood in France needed to be regenerated, and although I am far from adopting the popular declamations against the clergy, it appears to me that wealth, luxury, and a general inclination towards laxity had caused a decline of this great body, that the surplice often clothed a knight rather than an apostle, and that finally, in the period immediately preceding the Revolution, the clergy had gone down, nearly as much as the army, in the place it occupied in public opinion.

The first blow to the Church was the invasion of its properties;<sup>20</sup> the second was the constitutional oath,<sup>21</sup> and these two tyrannical measures began the regeneration. The oath sifted the clergy, if it may be put that way. All those who swore it, with some exceptions

<sup>19</sup> [On 25 September 1792, the Convention declared that the French Republic was 'one and indivisible'.]

<sup>20</sup> [The nationalization of the Church's property was voted by the Constituent Assembly on 16 April 1790. The legislation of 4 August 1789 had already abolished the tithe.]

<sup>21</sup> [A decree of 27 November 1790 required all clerics holding ecclesiastical posts under the provisions of the Civil Constitution of the Clergy (12 July 1790) to take an oath to support the constitution. Most of the bishops and about half the parish priests refused; this was the beginning of a schism in the French Church.]

that may be disregarded, saw themselves led by degrees into an abyss of crime and disgrace; opinion is unanimous on these apostates.

The loyal priests, recommended to this same opinion by their initial act of firmness, rendered themselves even more illustrious by the intrepid way they braved sufferings and even death for the defence of their faith. The massacre of the Carmelites compares in its nobility with anything in ecclesiastical history.<sup>22</sup>

The tyranny that, against all justice and decency, chased thousands of priests from their country was no doubt the most revolting imaginable; but here as before, the crimes of the French tyrants became the instruments of Providence. It was probably necessary that French priests be displayed to foreign nations; they have lived among Protestant peoples, and this coming together has greatly diminished hatreds and prejudices. The considerable emigration of clergy, especially French bishops, to England, appears to me a particularly remarkable event. Surely, words of peace will have been spoken and projects for reconciliation formed during this extraordinary meeting. Even if mutual hopes are all that result, this would be a lot. If ever Christians are to be reconciled, and everything suggests that they should, it seems that the *initiative* must come from the Church of England.<sup>23</sup> Presbyterianism was a French, and consequently an exaggerated, creation. We are too remote from the followers of this too-insubstantial religion; there are no means of getting to know one another. But the Anglican church, which touches us with one hand, touches with the other those whom we cannot approach. And although from one point of view, this church is exposed to attack from both sides and presents the slightly ridiculous spectacle of a rebel who preaches obedience, still from another point of view, it is very valuable and can perhaps be considered as one of those chemical intermediates capable of combining otherwise incompatible elements.

The property of the clergy having disappeared, everything conspires to restore the priesthood, since for a long time to come, new

<sup>22</sup> [Sixteen Carmelite nuns were guillotined in Paris in July 1794; this episode was the subject of a novel by Gertrude von Le Fort and an opera by Poulenc.]

<sup>23</sup> [Maistre was always interested in this possibility. In an unedited memoir on Freemasonry written in 1782, he had proposed achieving this goal by working quietly through the Masonic lodges. See 'Mémoire au duc de Brunswick' in *Écrits maçonniques de Joseph de Maistre*, ed. Jean Rebotto (Geneva: Slatkine, 1983), pp. 106–8. In 1819, he hoped that Tsar Alexander would take up the task. See *Lettre à M. le Marquis sur l'état du Christianisme en Europe*, *Oeuvres*, VIII, 515–16.]

members are unlikely to be attracted by base motives. Moreover, there is reason to believe that contemplation of the work to be done will produce the kind of exaltation that raises men above themselves and makes them capable of accomplishing great things.

We must add to these circumstances the ferment of ideas in certain European countries, the exalted ideas of several remarkable men, and the kind of disquiet that is affecting religious dispositions, especially in Protestant lands, and is pushing some along extraordinary paths.<sup>24</sup>

At one and the same time we see the storm rumbling over Italy, Rome as well as Geneva menaced by the power that wants no religions,<sup>25</sup> and the national supremacy of religion in Holland abolished by a decree of the national convention.<sup>26</sup> If Providence *erases*, it is no doubt in order to *write*.

I also observe that when great creeds have established themselves in the world, they have been favoured by great conquests, by the formation of vast sovereignties, and the reason for this is apparent.

Finally, what is going to happen in our own time as a result of these extraordinary combinations that have deceived all human prudence? In truth, one would be tempted to believe that the political revolution is only a secondary object in the great plan unrolling before us with such terrible majesty.

I spoke, in the beginning, of the *magistracy* that France exercises over the rest of Europe. Providence, which always proportions the means to the end, and which gives to nations as to individuals the necessary organs for the accomplishment of their goals, has given the French nation precisely two instruments, two *arms*, so to speak, with which it stirs up the world – the French language and the spirit of proselytism that forms the essence of the nation's character. Consequently, France constantly has both the need and the power to influence men.

<sup>24</sup> [Maistre had a life-long interest in Freemasonry, 'illuminism', and various currents of mysticism. This passage appears to refer to these movements. In the late 1790s, in particular, a number of mystics, of whom Lavater and Klopstock were the most important, had considerable influence in Switzerland and Germany. See F. Baldensberger, *Le Mouvement des idées dans l'émigration française, 1789–1815* (Paris: Plan-Nourrit, 1925), Vol. II; pp. 185–217.]

<sup>25</sup> [In early 1797, French armies were threatening both Geneva and Rome.]

<sup>26</sup> [The National Assembly of the 'Batavian Republic' disestablished the Reformed Church in 1796.]

The power, I almost said the *monarchy*, of the French language is visible; you can at most only pretend to doubt it. And the spirit of proselytism is as obvious as the sun; from the fashion designer to the philosopher, it is the salient trait of the national character. This proselytism is commonly ridiculed, and really, in the forms it takes often merits ridicule. Fundamentally however, it is an *office*.

Moreover, there is an eternal law of the moral world that every *office* implies a duty. The Gallican church was a cornerstone of the Catholic system, or better, the *Christian* system, for in truth there is only the one. Although they may perhaps doubt it, churches opposing the universal Church subsist only by virtue of its existence, being similar to those parasitic plants, those sterile mistletoes that live only from the substance of the tree which supports them and which they impoverish.

Since the action and the reaction between opposing powers is always equal, it follows that the greatest efforts of the *Goddess of Reason* against Christianity should take place in France; the enemy attacked the citadel.

So the French clergy must remain alert; there are a thousand reasons for believing that they are being called to a great mission. And the same arguments that allow us to see why they have suffered also permit us to believe they are destined for a crucial task.

In a word, if there is no moral revolution in Europe, if the religious spirit is not reinforced in this part of the world, the social bond will dissolve. Nothing can be predicted, and anything must be expected, but if there is to be improvement in this matter, either France is called upon to produce it, or there is no more analogy, no more induction, no more art of prediction.

This consideration especially makes me think that the French Revolution is a great epoch and that its consequences, in all kinds of ways, will be felt far beyond the time of its explosion and the limits of its birthplace.

Consideration of the political consequences of the Revolution confirms the same opinion. How the European powers have deceived themselves about France! How they have *mediated vain things*! Oh you who believe yourselves independent because you have no judges on this earth, never say, 'That suits me'; DISCITE JUSTITIAM MONTE!<sup>27</sup>

<sup>27</sup> ['Pay attention when the Lord punishes you.' Proverbs 3:11; Hebrews 12:5.]



Whose hand was it that, severe and paternal at the same time, overwhelmed France with every imaginable calamity and sustained the empire with supernatural means by turning all the efforts of her enemies against themselves? Do not come and talk to us of assignats, the force of numbers, etc., for it is precisely the possibility of assignats and the force of numbers that is beyond nature. Moreover, neither paper money nor the advantage of numbers makes the winds favour French ships and repulse those of their enemies,<sup>28</sup> makes ice bridges the moment the French need them,<sup>29</sup> causes the sovereigns who oppose them to die at an appointed time,<sup>30</sup> allows the French to invade Italy without cannons,<sup>31</sup> or makes the reputedly bravest armies in the world throw down their arms to equal numbers and be taken prisoners.<sup>32</sup>

Read the fine reflections of M. Dumas on the present war;<sup>33</sup> *why* the war has taken its present character is perfectly clear, but the *how* is not. We must always go back to the Committee of Public Safety, which performed a miracle and whose spirit is still winning battles.

In summary, the chastisement of the *French*, as well as the protection accorded to France, departs from all the ordinary rules. But these two miracles together multiply each other and present one of the most astonishing spectacles that humanity has ever seen.

As events unfold, more answers and more wondrous relationships will be seen. Moreover, I see only a portion of the things that a more penetrating view could have discovered at the present time. The horrible effusion of human blood occasioned by this great upheaval is a terrible means; nevertheless, it is a means as much as a punishment, and it can be the subject of interesting reflections.

<sup>28</sup> [In June 1794, thirty-eight English ships failed to prevent a French grain convoy escorted by only three French frigates from reaching France.]

<sup>29</sup> [In 1795, in Holland, a French cavalry unit captured an English fleet trapped in the ice.]

<sup>30</sup> [The Swedish king, Gustavus III, was assassinated in March 1792, just when he was about to march against France. Catherine the Great of Russia, a determined opponent of the French Revolution, died in November 1796.]

<sup>31</sup> [Napoleon in his first Italian campaign in April 1796 was short of artillery because of a lack of horses to move his cannon.]

<sup>32</sup> [Probably a reference to Napoleon's rapid victories over the Piedmontese in April 1796, which from Maistre's Piedmontese point of view, seemed inexplicable.]

<sup>33</sup> [Mathieu Dumas, an *émigré* French officer, published a book entitled *Des Résultats de la dernière campagne* in 1797.]

## CHAPTER THREE

# On the Violent Destruction of the Human Species

The king of Dahomey, in the African interior, was not so wrong, unfortunately, when he recently told an Englishman, 'God made the world for war; all realms, great and small, have always practised it, although on different principles.'<sup>1</sup>

Unhappily, history proves that war is, in a certain sense, the habitual state of mankind, which is to say that human blood must flow without interruption somewhere or other on the globe, and that for every nation, peace is only a respite.

The closing of the temple of Janus under Augustus can be cited;<sup>2</sup> there was one year in Charlemagne's warlike reign (the year of 790) when there was no war.<sup>3</sup> One can point to a short period after the Peace of Ryswick in 1697 and another equally short after that of Karlowitz in 1699 when there was no war, not only in Europe, but even in all the known world. But these are merely exceptions. Moreover, who can know what is happening over the entire globe at a given time?

The century that is just ending began, for France, with a cruel war that was not terminated until the Treaty of Rastadt in 1714. In 1719, France declared war on Spain; the Treaty of Paris put an end to it

<sup>1</sup> *The History of Dahomey* by Archibald Dalziel, Biblioth. Brit., May 1796, vol. II, no. 1, p. 87.

<sup>2</sup> [It was a Roman custom that the doors of the temple of Janus were kept open in time of war and locked in time of peace. Up through the time of Augustus, these doors were closed only four times, twice during his reign.]

<sup>3</sup> *Histoire de Charlemagne*, by G. H. Gaillard, vol. II, bk. 1, ch. v.

in 1727.<sup>4</sup> The election of the king of Poland rekindled war in 1733; the peace was made in 1736. Four years later, the terrible War of the Austrian Succession broke out and lasted without interruption until 1748. Peace was beginning to heal up the wounds of eight years of war when, eight years later, the ambition of England forced France to take up arms again. The Seven Years' War is too well known. After fifteen years of peace, the American Revolution involved France anew in a war the consequences of which all human wisdom could not foresee.<sup>5</sup> The peace was signed in 1782; seven years later the Revolution began. It still continues, and it has cost France perhaps 3 million men so far.<sup>6</sup>

Thus, considering France alone, here are forty years of war out of ninety-six. If there are nations more fortunate, there are also many less fortunate.

But it is not enough to consider one period of time and one spot on the globe; one must look at the long series of massacres that has soiled every page of history. One sees war raging without interruption, like a continuing fever marked by terrifying paroxysms. I ask the reader to follow the record since the decline of the Roman Republic.

In one battle Marius exterminated two hundred thousand Cimbri and Teutons.<sup>7</sup> Mithridates slaughtered eighty thousand Romans.<sup>8</sup> Sulla killed ninety thousand men in a battle fought in Boeotia, where he lost ten thousand himself.<sup>9</sup> Soon you see civil wars and proscriptions. Caesar alone killed a million men on the battlefield (before him, Alexander had had this melancholy honour). Augustus closed the temple of Janus momentarily, but he reopened it for centuries by establishing an elective empire. A few good princes gave the state a breathing spell, but war never ceased, and under the rule of the *good*

<sup>4</sup> [Peace was signed between France and Spain in Madrid in 1720. The Treaty of Paris of 1727 was only a convention by which Spain and England (still at war) accepted French arbitration.]

<sup>5</sup> [Maistre evidently regarded French involvement in the American War of Independence as one of the causes of the French Revolution.]

<sup>6</sup> [The figure of 3 million is exaggerated.]

<sup>7</sup> [Marius, a famous Roman general, defeated these barbarian tribes at Vercelli in Italy in 101 BC.]

<sup>8</sup> [Mithridates VI Eupator (120–63 BC), king of Pontus, conquered parts of Asia Minor and bitterly opposed Roman expansion in this area before he was finally defeated by Pompey.]

<sup>9</sup> [Sulla (138–78 BC) was another Roman general.]

Titus, six hundred thousand men perished in the siege of Jerusalem.<sup>10</sup> The destruction of men brought about by the Roman armies is truly frightening.<sup>11</sup> The late empire is nothing but a series of massacres. To begin with Constantine, what wars and what battles! Licinius loses twenty thousand men at Cibalis, thirty-four thousand at Adrianople, and a hundred thousand at Chrysoupolis.<sup>12</sup> The Nordic peoples begin to move. The Franks, the Goths, the Huns, the Lombards, the Alans, the Vandals, etc. attack the empire and successively tear it to pieces. Attila puts Europe to fire and sword. The Franks kill more than two hundred thousand of his men near Châlons,<sup>13</sup> and the Goths, the following year, cost him more still. In less than a century, Rome was taken and sacked three times; and in a revolt that broke out in Constantinople, forty thousand people were slaughtered. The Goths made themselves masters of Milan and killed three hundred thousand inhabitants. Totila massacred all the inhabitants of Tivoli and ninety thousand men at the sack of Rome.<sup>14</sup>

Mohammed appears; the sword and Koran overrun two-thirds of the world. The Saracens sail from the Euphrates to the Guadalquivir. The immense city of Syracuse is razed to its foundations; they lose thirty thousand men in a single naval combat near Constantinople, and Pelagius kills twenty thousand of them in a land battle.<sup>15</sup> These losses were nothing for the Saracens; but the torrent encountered the genius of the Franks on the plain of Tours, where the son of the first Pepin, in the midst of three hundred thousand cadavers, attached to his name the terrible epithet that distinguishes it still.<sup>16</sup>

Islam is carried to Spain and finds there an indomitable rival.<sup>17</sup> Perhaps never has more glory, more grandeur, and more carnage been seen than in the eight-hundred-year struggle between Christians and Muslims in Spain. Several expeditions, several battles even, cost twenty, thirty, forty, up to eighty thousand lives.

<sup>10</sup> [The siege of Jerusalem occurred in 70 AD.]

<sup>11</sup> Montesquieu, *Esprit des lois*, bk XXIII, ch. xix.

<sup>12</sup> [Valerius Licinius, Constantine's brother-in-law, shared power with him (313-23) until attacked by Constantine. He was defeated in the battles named by Maistre.]

<sup>13</sup> [The battle of Châlons took place in 451.]

<sup>14</sup> [Totila was king of the Ostrogoths in Italy (541-52).]

<sup>15</sup> [Pelagius 718-37) was the first Christian king of Spain during the Moorish period.]

<sup>16</sup> [Charles Martel (*martel* means 'hammer') defeated the Saracens at the battle of Tours (732). The casualties were certainly much lower than Maistre suggests.]

<sup>17</sup> [Catholicism.]

Charlemagne ascends the throne, and there is a half-century of fighting. Every year he decrees death for some portion of Europe. Active everywhere and everywhere the conqueror, he wipes out iron-strong nations as easily as Caesar wiped out the effeminate men of Asia. The Normans begin that long series of ravages and cruelties that still make us shudder. Charlemagne's immense heritage is torn apart; ambition covers it with blood, and the name of the Franks disappears at the battle of Fontenay.<sup>18</sup> All Italy is pillaged by the Saracens while the Normans, Danes, and Hungarians ravage France, Holland, England, Germany, and Greece. The barbarian nations are finally established and tamed. This vein yields no more blood; another is opened immediately with the beginning of the Crusades. All Europe throws itself on Asia; the number of victims can be counted only in myriads. Genghis Khan and his sons subjugate and ravage the world from China to Bohemia. The French, who are involved in crusades against the Muslims, also crusade against the heretics in the cruel Albigensian war.<sup>19</sup> In the battle of Bouvines, thirty thousand men lose their lives.<sup>20</sup> Five years later, eighty thousand Saracens perish at the siege of Damietta.<sup>21</sup> Guelphs and Ghibellines begin the conflict that will stain Italy with blood for so long.<sup>22</sup> The torch of civil war is kindled in Germany. Then the Sicilian Vespers.<sup>23</sup> Under the reigns of Edward and Philip of Valois, France and England hurl themselves at each other more violently than ever and create a new era of carnage. The massacre of Jews. The battle of Poitiers.<sup>24</sup> The battle of Nicopolis.<sup>25</sup> The vanquisher falls under the blows of Tamerlane, who repeats Genghis Khan. The duke of Burgundy has the duke of Orléans assassinated, and the bloody

<sup>18</sup> [The battle of Fontenay (841) saw the defeat of Lothair, Charlemagne's successor as emperor, by his brothers, Louis the German and Charles the Bald.]

<sup>19</sup> [The Albigensian Crusade (1209-29) was a campaign against the Albigensian heretics in southern France.]

<sup>20</sup> [Otto IV, the Holy Roman emperor, was defeated at Bouvines in 1214 by Philip Augustus of France.]

<sup>21</sup> [Damietta, in Egypt, was besieged by Saint Louis in 1249 during the Seventh Crusade.]

<sup>22</sup> [The Guelphs, the papal party, and the Ghibellines, the imperial party, were engaged in bitter rivalry from the thirteenth through the fifteenth centuries.]

<sup>23</sup> [The Sicilian Vespers was an uprising against the Angevin monarchy in Sicily which began on Easter Sunday, 1282.]

<sup>24</sup> [Poitiers (1356) was a French defeat at the hands of Edward, the Black Prince.]

<sup>25</sup> [Nicopolis was a city on the Danube where a 'crusading' expedition under King Sigismund of Hungary was defeated by the Turks in 1396.]



rivalry of these two families begins.<sup>26</sup> The battle of Agincourt.<sup>27</sup> The Hussites put much of Germany to fire and sword. Mohammed II reigns and fights for thirty years.<sup>28</sup> England, forced back within its own frontiers, is torn apart by internal troubles as the houses of York and Lancaster bathe the country in blood.<sup>29</sup> The Burgundian heiress joins her states to the house of Austria, and in this marriage contract it is written that men will slaughter each other for centuries from the Baltic to the Mediterranean.<sup>30</sup> The discovery of the new world means the death sentence for three million Indians. Charles V and Francis I appear on the world stage, and every page of their history is red with human blood. The reign of Suleiman.<sup>31</sup> The battle of Mohacs.<sup>32</sup> The siege of Vienna,<sup>33</sup> the siege of Malta,<sup>34</sup> etc. But it is from the shadow of a cloister that there emerges one of mankind's very greatest scourges. Luther appears; Calvin follows him. The Peasants' Revolt; the Thirty Years' War; the civil war in France; the massacre of the Low Countries; the massacre of Ireland; the massacre of the Cévennes; St Bartholomew's Day; the murders of Henry II, Henry IV, Mary Stuart, and Charles I; and finally, in our day, from the same source, the French Revolution.<sup>35</sup>

I will not carry this frightful catalogue any further; our own century and the preceding one are too well known. If you go back to the birth of nations, if you come down to our own day, if you examine peoples in all possible conditions from the state of barbarism to the most advanced civilization, you always find war. From this primary cause, and from all the other connected causes, the effusion of human blood

<sup>26</sup> [The assassination of the duke of Orléans in 1407 was followed by a civil war between the Armagnacs (from the duke of Orléan's father-in-law, the count of Armagnac) and the Burgundians.]

<sup>27</sup> [Agincourt (1415) was another English victory over the French.]

<sup>28</sup> [Mohammed II, the Conqueror, who reigned from 1451 to 1481, brought the Byzantine Empire to an end by his conquest of Constantinople in 1453.]

<sup>29</sup> [The Wars of the Roses (1455-85).]

<sup>30</sup> [The marriage of the heiress of the duke of Burgundy to Maximilian of Austria was a first step in the creation of the dynastic empire of their grandson, Charles V, and the Hapsburg-Valois rivalry.]

<sup>31</sup> [Suleiman the Magnificent, Sultan of Turkey (1520-66).]

<sup>32</sup> [Defeat of the Hungarians by the Turks in 1526.]

<sup>33</sup> [The first siege of Vienna by the Turks in 1529.]

<sup>34</sup> [Malta was besieged by the Turks in 1565.]

<sup>35</sup> [Maistre blamed all these events, including the French Revolution, on Protestantism. See his 'Réflexions sur le protestantisme dans ses rapports avec la souveraineté', *Oeuvres*, VIII, 63-97.]

has never ceased in the world. Sometimes blood flows less abundantly over some larger area, sometimes it flows more abundantly in a more restricted area, but the flow remains nearly constant.

But from time to time the flow is augmented prodigiously by such extraordinary events as the Punic Wars, the Triumvirate, the victories of Caesar, the irruption of the barbarians, the Crusades, the wars of religion, the Spanish Succession, the French Revolution, etc. If one had a table of massacres similar to a meteorological table, who knows whether, after centuries of observation, some law might not be discovered?<sup>36</sup> Buffon has proven quite clearly that a large percentage of animals are destined to die a violent death.<sup>37</sup> He could apparently have extended the demonstration to man; but let the facts speak for themselves.

Yet there is room to doubt whether this violent destruction is, in general, such a great evil as is believed; at least, it is one of those evils that enters into an order of things where everything is violent and *against nature*, and that produces compensations. First, when the human soul has lost its strength through laziness, incredulity, and the gangrenous vices that follow an excess of civilization, it can be retempered only in blood. Certainly there is no easy explanation of why war produces different effects in different circumstances. But it can be seen clearly enough that mankind may be considered as a tree which an invisible hand is continually pruning and which often profits from the operation. In truth the tree may perish if the trunk is cut or if the tree is *overpruned*; but who knows the limits of the human tree? What we do know is that excessive carnage is often allied with excessive population, as was seen especially in the ancient Greek republics and in Spain under the Arab domination.<sup>38</sup> Platitudes about

<sup>36</sup> There is, for example, the report made by the chief surgeon of the Imperial Army that 33,543 of the 215,000 men employed by the Emperor Joseph II against the Turks from 1 June 1788 to 1 May 1789 perished from illness, while 80,000 were killed in action. And according to an approximate calculation made in Germany, up to October 1795, the present war has already cost France a million men and the allies 500,000. 'Extrait d'un ouvrage periodique Allemand' in the *Courrier de Francfort*, 28 October 1795, no. 296.

<sup>37</sup> [Buffon (1707-88) was a famous French naturalist, some of whose speculations anticipated Darwin.]

<sup>38</sup> Spain at that time had something like forty million inhabitants; today it has only ten. 'In the old days, Greece flourished in the midst of cruel wars; blood flowed in torrents, but the land was thickly peopled. *It seemed*, said Machiavelli, *that in spite of murder, proscription, and civil strife, our republic became stronger than ever, etc.*' Rousseau, *Contrat social*, bk. III, ch. ix, n.

war mean nothing. One need not be very clever to know that when more men are killed, fewer remain at the moment, just as it is true that the more branches one cuts off, the fewer remain on the tree. But the results of the operation are what must be considered. Moreover, following the same comparison, we may observe that the skilful gardener directs the pruning less towards lush vegetation than towards the fructification of the tree; he wants fruit, not wood or leaves. Now the real *fruits* of human nature – the arts, sciences, great enterprises, lofty conceptions, manly virtues – are due especially to the state of war. We know that nations have never achieved the highest point of the greatness of which they are capable except after long and bloody wars. Thus, Greece's most brilliant hour was the terrible epoch of the Peloponnesian War; the Age of Augustus followed immediately the civil war and the proscriptions; French genius was hewn by the League and polished by the Fronde; all the great men of the century of Queen Anne were born in the midst of political upheavals. In a word, we can say that blood is the manure of the plant we call *genius*.

I wonder if those who say that *the arts are the friends of peace* really know what they are saying. It would at least be necessary to explain and circumscribe the proposition, for I see nothing less pacific than the centuries of Alexander and Pericles, of Augustus, of Leo X and Francis I, of Louis XIV and Queen Anne.

Could the shedding of human blood possibly not have serious causes and serious effects? Let us reflect; history and fable, the discoveries of modern physiology and antique tradition all unite to furnish material for these meditations. We should not be more ashamed of speculating on this subject than on a thousand others less relevant to man.

In the meantime let us thunder against war and try to teach sovereigns an aversion to it; but let us not give in to the dreams of Condorcet, that *philosophe* so dear to the Revolution, who used his life to prepare the unhappiness of the present generation, graciously willing perfection to posterity.<sup>39</sup> There is only one way of restraining the scourge of war, and that is by restraining the disorders that lead to this terrible purification.

<sup>39</sup> [Condorcet, whose famous *Esquisse d'un tableau historique des progrès de l'esprit humain* (1794) was written while he was in hiding during the Terror, seemed to Maistre the worst example of a blind optimist.]



In the Greek tragedy of *Orestes*, Helen, one of the characters in the play, is taken away by the gods to the just resentment of the Greeks, and placed in the sky beside her two brothers to be a guiding sign to navigators. Apollo appears in order to justify this strange apotheosis.<sup>40</sup> 'Helen's beauty', he says, 'was only an instrument that the gods used to set the Greeks and Trojans against each other to cause their blood to flow, in order to quench on earth the iniquity of men become too numerous.'<sup>41</sup>

Apollo spoke very well. Men gather the clouds, and then they complain of the tempests that follow. 'It is the anger of kings that arms the earth; it is the anger of heaven that arms the kings.'<sup>42</sup>

I know well that in all these considerations we are continually troubled by the wearisome sight of the innocent who perish with the guilty. But without becoming deeply involved in this most profound question, we can consider it solely in the light of the age-old dogma that *the innocent suffer for the benefit of the guilty*.

It was from this dogma, it seems to me, that the ancients derived the custom of sacrifices that was practised everywhere and that was judged useful not only for the living but also for the dead,<sup>43</sup> a typical custom that habit has led us to regard without astonishment, but whose roots are nonetheless difficult to discover.

Self-sacrifices, so famous in antiquity, come from the same dogma. Decius<sup>44</sup> had *faith* that the sacrifice of his life would be accepted by the Divinity and that he could use it to balance all the evils that menaced his country.<sup>45</sup>

Christianity came to consecrate this dogma, which is perfectly natural to man although appearing difficult to arrive at by reason.

Thus, there could have been in the heart of Louis XVI, in that of the saintly Elizabeth,<sup>46</sup> such an impulse, such an acceptance, capable of saving France.

<sup>40</sup> 'A point worthy of him who maintains it.' Horace, *Ars Poetica*, 191.

<sup>41</sup> Euripides, *Orestes*, 1638-42.

<sup>42</sup> [The verse is by J.-B. Rousseau.]

<sup>43</sup> They sacrificed, literally, 'for the repose of souls; and these sacrifices', Plato says, 'are of great efficacy, as has been said by entire cities, by poets born of the gods, and by prophets inspired by the gods'. Plato, *De Republica*, bk. II.

<sup>44</sup> [Decius was the name of three Romans who are supposed to have sacrificed themselves to the gods to secure victories for the Roman armies in 340, 295, and 290 BC.]

<sup>45</sup> 'To expiate all anger of the gods . . . the one had drawn all the threats and menaces of the supernal and infernal gods upon himself alone.' Livy, VIII, 9 and 10.

<sup>46</sup> [Madame Elizabeth, who was executed in 1794, was a younger sister of Louis XVI.]

Sometimes it is asked, Of what use are these terrible austerities, which are also self-sacrifices, practised by certain religious orders? It would be precisely the same thing to ask of what use is Christianity, which rests entirely on an enlargement of this same dogma of innocence paying for crime.<sup>47</sup>

The authority that approves these orders chooses certain men and *insulates* them from the world in order to make them *conductors*.

There is nothing but violence in the universe; but we are spoiled by a modern philosophy that tells us *all is good*,<sup>48</sup> whereas evil has tainted everything, and in a very real sense, *all is evil*, since nothing is in its place. The keynote of the system of our creation has been lowered, and following the rules of harmony, all the others have been lowered proportionately. *All creation groans*,<sup>49</sup> and tends with pain and effort towards another order of things.

The spectators of great human calamities, especially, are led to these sad meditations. But let us not lose courage: there is no chastisement that does not purify; there is no disorder that ETERNAL LOVE does not turn against the principle of evil. It is gratifying amid the general upheaval to have a presentiment of the plans of Divinity. We will never see the complete picture during our earthly sojourn, and often we will deceive ourselves; but in all possible sciences, except the exact sciences, are we not reduced to conjecture? And if our conjectures are plausible, if there are analogies for them, if they are based on universally accepted ideas, above all if they are consoling and suited to make us better men, what do they lack? If they are not true, they are good; or rather, since they are good, are they not true?

Having envisaged the French Revolution from a purely moral point of view, I now turn my speculations to politics, without, however, forgetting the primary aim of my work.

<sup>47</sup> [Maistre develops this theme in his *Eclaircissement sur les sacrifices*, *Oeuvres*, v, 283–360.]

<sup>48</sup> [*Tout est bien*. Maistre is castigating the ‘best of all possible worlds’ optimism that seemed to characterize some eighteenth-century thinkers. Of course Maistre was not alone in this reaction; Voltaire’s *Candide*, for example, included a brilliant satire on philosophical optimism.]

<sup>49</sup> St Paul to the Romans, 8:22. Charles Bonnet’s system of Palingenesis has some similarities with St Paul’s text; but this idea does not take him to that of a prior degradation. Nevertheless they agree quite well. [Charles Bonnet (1720–93) was a Swiss naturalist and philosopher whose philosophical theories combined Leibnizian and Christian metaphysics. His *Palingénésie philosophique* was published in 1769.]

## CHAPTER FOUR

### Can the French Republic Last?

It would be better to ask whether the Republic can exist.<sup>1</sup> The assumption is made, but too hastily, and the *preliminary question* seems quite justified, for nature and history together prove that a large indivisible republic is an impossibility. A small number of republicans closed up within the walls of a city can undoubtedly have millions of subjects; this was the case with Rome. But a large and free nation cannot exist under a republican government. The thing is so clear in itself that theory could dispense with experience; but here experience, which decides every question in politics as in physics, is perfectly in accord with theory.

What could have been said to the French to get them to believe in a republic of twenty-four million people? Two things only: (1) nothing prevents us from doing something that has never been seen before; (2) the discovery of the representative system makes possible for us what was impossible for our predecessors. Let us examine the strength of these two arguments.

If we are told that a die thrown a billion times had never turned up anything but five numbers – 1, 2, 3, 4, and 5 – could we believe that there was a 6 on one of the faces? NO, undoubtedly; and it would be as obvious to us as if we had seen it that one of the faces is blank or that one of the numbers is repeated.

Well then! Let us run through history; there you will see so-called *Fortune* tirelessly throwing the die for over four thousand years. Has

<sup>1</sup> [This chapter is apparently a direct response to Benjamin Constant's 'Objections Drawn from Experience against the Possibility of a Republic in a Large State'. See his *De la Force du gouvernement actuel et de la nécessité de s'y rallier* (Paris: 1796). Constant argued from the possibility of progress.]

LARGE REPUBLIC ever been rolled? No. Therefore, that *number* is not on the die.

If the world had seen the successive development of new forms of government, we would have no right to affirm that such-and-such a form of government is impossible because it has never been seen. But things are exactly the opposite; monarchies have always existed, and sometimes republics. If we want to go into the subdivisions, we can call government where the masses exercise sovereignty *democracy*, and that where sovereignty belongs to a more or less restricted number of privileged families *aristocracy*. And everything has been said.

The comparison with the die is perfectly exact; the same numbers always coming from the horn of Fortune, we are authorized by the theory of probabilities to affirm that there are no others.

Let us not confuse the essences of things with their modifications: the first are unalterable and always remain the same, the second change and vary the spectacle a little, at least for the multitude; but every experienced eye will easily penetrate the changing cloak with which eternal nature is enveloped according to time and place.

For example, what is peculiar and new about the three powers that constitute the government of England? The names of the *Peers* and the *Commons*, the costumes of the lords, etc. But the three powers, considered in the abstract, are to be found wherever a wise and lasting liberty is to be found; above all, they were found in Sparta, where the government, before Lycurgus, 'was always in oscillation, inclining at one time to tyranny when the kings had too much power and at another time to popular confusion when the common people had usurped too much authority'. But Lycurgus placed the senate between the two, so that it was, according to Plato, 'a salutary counterweight . . . and a strong barrier holding the two extremities in equal balance and giving a firm and assured foundation to the health of the state, because the senators . . . ranged themselves on the side of the king when there was need to resist popular temerity, and on the other hand, just as strongly took the part of the people against the king to prevent the latter from usurping a tyrannical power'.<sup>2</sup>

Thus, nothing is new, and a large republic is impossible, since there has never been a large republic.

<sup>2</sup> Plutarch, *Life of Lycurgus*, Amyot's translation.

As for the representative system, which some people believe capable of resolving the problem, I hope I will be pardoned for a digression.

Let us begin by noting that this system is by no means a modern discovery, but was a *production*, or better, a *piece*, of feudal government when the latter attained that state of maturity and equilibrium which made it, all things considered, the most perfect in the world.<sup>3</sup>

Having formed the communes, the royal authority called them to the national assemblies; they could appear there only through their mandatories, and this is how the representative system began.

In passing, the same thing may be said of trial by jury. Within the hierarchy of tenures the vassals of the same order were called to the courts of their respective suzerains; from this was born the maxim that every man must be judged by his peers (*Pares curtis*).<sup>4</sup> The English have maintained the idea in its full extent and have even developed it from its original sense; but the French, less tenacious, or ceding perhaps to invincible circumstances, have not extended it to the same degree.

One would have to be incapable of penetrating to what Bacon calls the *interiora rerum* to imagine that men could have erected such institutions by anterior reasoning or that they could be the fruit of deliberation.

Moreover, national representation is not peculiar to England: it is to be found in every European monarchy; although it is alive in Great Britain, elsewhere it is dead or sleeping. To consider if its suspension is humanity's misfortune or if we should return to the old forms is beyond the scope of this little work. Let the following historical observations suffice: (1) in England, where national representation has gained and retained more strength than anywhere else, there is no mention of such a thing before the thirteenth century;<sup>5</sup> (2) the system was not an invention, or the result of deliberation, or the result of the action of the people making use of their ancient rights,

<sup>3</sup> 'I do not believe that there has ever been such a well-tempered government on the earth.' Montesquieu, *Esprit des lois*, bk. xi, ch. viii.

<sup>4</sup> See the *Book of Fiefs*, following Roman Law.

<sup>5</sup> English democrats have tried to push the origins of the rights of the Commons much further back and have even found them in the famous WITENAGEMOTS; but they have had to abandon with good grace this untenable thesis. Hume, vol. 1, appendix 1, p. 144; appendix II, p. 407 (London, 1762). [The witenagemot, or witan, was the council of 'wise men' upon whom the Anglo-Saxon kings could call for advice.]



but was, in reality, the work of an ambitious soldier, who, after the battle of Lewes, created the balance of the three powers without knowing what he was *doing*, as always happens;<sup>6</sup> (3) not only was the convocation of the Commons to the National Council a concession of the monarch, but in the beginning the king named the representatives of the provinces, cities, and boroughs; (4) even after the Commons arrogated to themselves the right of sending representatives to Parliament during Edward I's journey to Palestine, they had there only a consultative voice; they presented their *grievances*, like the Estates-General in France, and the formula for the concessions emanating from the throne as a result of their petitions was always *Granted by the King and the spiritual and temporal lords on the humble prayers of the Commons*; and finally (5) the attribution of co-legislative power to the House of Commons is still quite new, since it scarcely goes back to the middle of the fifteenth century.

So if the phrase 'national representation' is understood to mean a *certain* number of representatives sent by *certain* men taken from *certain* cities and boroughs by virtue of an old concession by the sovereign, there is no dispute – such a government exists, and it is that of England. But if the phrase is understood to mean that *all* the people are represented, that they may be represented only by virtue of a mandate,<sup>7</sup> and that every citizen, with some physically and morally inevitable exceptions, is able to give or receive these mandates, and if there is also a claim to join to such an order of things the abolition of all hereditary distinctions and offices, this representation is a thing that has never been seen and that will never succeed.<sup>8</sup>

America is often cited. I know of nothing so provoking as the praises bestowed on this babe-in-arms. Let it grow.

<sup>6</sup> [The battle of Lewes (1264) was a victory for the barons, led by Simon de Montfort, over King Henry III. The next year, for the first time, burgesses elected by the boroughs were summoned to Parliament along with prelates, barons, and knights. The relationship between these events was not as clear-cut as Maistre suggests.]

<sup>7</sup> It is often assumed, either through bad faith or inattention, that only a mandatory can be a representative. This is an error. Children, fools, and absentees are represented every day in the courts by men who hold their mandate from the law only; moreover, the *people* eminently combine these three characteristics, for they are always *childish*, always *foolish*, and always *absent*. So why should their *tutors* not dispense with their mandates?

<sup>8</sup> [The Constitution of the Year II declared, 'Equality does not admit of any distinction of birth or any inheritance of powers.']

But to make this discussion as clear as possible, we must note that the instigators of the French Republic are bound to prove not only that *perfected* representation (so styled by the innovators) is possible and good, but also that the people can by this means retain their sovereignty (again, so they say) and form, in their totality, a republic. This is the crux of the question, for if the *republic* is in the capital and the rest of France is *subject* to the republic, the republic is not accountable to the *sovereign people*.

The recent commission that was charged with proposing a method of national representation estimated the French population at thirty million. Let us accept this number and assume that France keeps her conquests. Each year, according to the terms of the constitution, two hundred and fifty members of the legislative body will be replaced by two hundred and fifty others. So if the assumed fifteen million males in the population were immortal, qualified as representatives, and named in rotation, then each Frenchman would exercise his turn at national sovereignty once in every sixteen thousand years. But since some men cannot be prevented from dying from time to time in this interval, and since moreover, some people may be elected more than once, and since many individuals, by nature and good sense, will always be ineligible as national representatives, the imagination is staggered by the prodigious number of sovereigns condemned to die without having reigned.<sup>9</sup>

Rousseau maintained that *the national will cannot be delegated*; one may agree or not and debate such academic questions a thousand years, but what is sure is that the representative system directly excludes the exercise of sovereignty, especially in the French system, where the rights of the people are limited to selecting electors and where not only are the people unable to give special mandates to their representatives, but the law carefully severs all relations between representatives and their respective provinces by warning them that *they are not sent by those who sent them, but by the nation*,<sup>10</sup> a wonderfully convenient word, since one makes of it whatever one wishes. In

<sup>9</sup> I am not counting the five places as Directors. For these, the chance is so small that it can be considered zero.

<sup>10</sup> [Article 52 of the Constitution of 1795 states, 'The members of the Legislative Body are not representatives of the department which has elected them, but of the entire nation.']

short, it is impossible to imagine a system better calculated to annihilate the rights of the people.

Thus that vile Jacobin conspirator was quite right when he declared roundly during a judicial inquiry, 'I believe the present government a usurper of authority, a violator of all the rights of the people, who have been reduced to the most deplorable slavery. It is a frightful system of the happiness of the few founded on the oppression of the masses. The people are so muzzled, so loaded with chains by this aristocratic government, that it is becoming more difficult than ever for them to break them.'<sup>11</sup>

So what does this vain honour of representation mean to the *nation* when it is involved so indirectly and when millions of individuals will never participate? Are sovereignty and government any less alien to them?

But, they say in answering the argument, what does it matter to the nation whether representation is a vain honour, if the system establishes public liberty?

This is not the question. The question is not whether the French people can be *free* with the constitution they have been given, but whether they can be *sovereign*. They change the question to escape the logic. Let us begin by excluding the exercise of sovereignty and insist on the fundamental point that the sovereign will always be in Paris, that all this noise about representation means nothing, that the *people* remain perfectly alien to government, that they are more subject than they were under a monarchy, and that the phrase *large republic*, like *square circle*, is self-contradictory. Moreover, the argument has been demonstrated arithmetically.

The question may be reduced to finding out whether the interests of the French people are served by being *subject* to an executive directory and two councils as instituted by the 1795 constitution rather than to a king reigning according to the old forms. There is much less difficulty in resolving a problem than in posing it.

<sup>11</sup> See the interrogation of Babeuf, June 1796. ['Gracchus' Babeuf has an honoured position in the history of socialism, but he might be characterized more accurately as a primitive communist who combined the traditional demand for the abolition of poverty with a willingness to use terror and a Jacobin style of dictatorship to achieve his ideal. His Conspiracy of the Equals against the Directory failed miserably, and he was executed in May 1797.]



So we must discard this word *republic* and speak only of the government. I will not discuss whether or not this government is fit to secure the public welfare; the French know the answer well enough! But given its nature, no matter what it is called, let us see if one may believe in its permanence.

Let us first of all raise ourselves to a level that befits an intelligent being, and from this elevated point of view, consider the origins of this government.

Evil has nothing in common with life; it cannot create, since its power is purely negative. *Evil is the schism of being; it is not true.*

Now what distinguishes the French Revolution and makes it an *event* unique in history is that it is radically *bad*. No element of good disturbs the eye of the observer; it is the highest degree of corruption ever known; it is pure impurity.

On what page of history will you find such a great quantity of vices assembled at one time on the same stage? What a horrible assemblage of baseness and cruelty! What profound immorality! What absence of all decency!

The characteristics of the springtime of liberty are so striking that it is impossible to be mistaken. It is a time when love of the fatherland is a religion and respect for the laws a superstition, a time of sturdy character and austere morals, when every virtue flourishes at the same time, when factions benefit the fatherland because they fight only for the honour of serving it, when everything, even crime, carries the mark of greatness.

If this picture is compared to the one offered us by France, how can anyone believe in the permanence of a liberty that springs from gangrene? Or, more precisely, how can one believe that this liberty can be born (since it does not as yet exist) or that from the heart of the most disgusting corruption there can emerge the form of government that less than any other may dispense with virtue? When one hears these so-called republicans talk of liberty and virtue, one thinks of a faded courtesan with rouged blushes putting on the airs of a virgin.

A republican journal reports the following anecdote on Parisian morals today: 'A case of seduction was pleaded before the Civil Tribunal. A young girl of fourteen astonished the judges by a degree of corruption that more than matched the profound immorality of her seducer. More than half the audience was composed of young women

and young girls; among them more than twenty were no more than thirteen or fourteen, several being with their mothers. And instead of covering their faces, they laughed loudly at the necessary but disgusting details that made the men blush.<sup>12</sup>

I ask the reader to recall that Roman citizen who, in the days of Roman greatness, was punished for having embraced his wife before his children. Draw the parallel and your own conclusion.<sup>13</sup>

No doubt the French Revolution has lasted long enough to go through several phases; nevertheless, its general character has never varied, and from its birth there was evidence of what it would become. There was a certain inexplicable delirium, a blind impetuosity, a scandalous contempt for everything respectable, a new kind of atrocity that joked about its crimes, and especially, an impudent prostitution of reasoning and of every word meant to express ideas of justice and virtue.

In particular, if we consider the acts of the National Assembly, it is difficult to find anything to approve. When I think back to the time of its meeting, I sense myself transported like the sublime bard of England to an imaginary world; I see mankind's enemy seated in the Riding School and calling every *evil spirit* to this new *pandemonium*;<sup>14</sup> I hear distinctly *il rauco suon delle tartare trombe*,<sup>15</sup> and I see all the vices of France hasten to the call. And I am not so sure that all this is an allegory.

And notice again how crime forms the foundation of the entire republican edifice: this word 'citizen', which they have substituted for the old forms of courtesy, is addressed to the vilest of humans; the brigands invented this new title in one of their legislative orgies.<sup>16</sup> The republican calendar, which must not be seen merely as something ridiculous, was a conspiracy against religion. Their era dates from the greatest crimes that have ever dishonoured humanity; they cannot date an act without covering themselves with shame and recalling the dishonourable origin of a government whose very holidays are frightening.

<sup>12</sup> *Journal de l'opposition*, 1795, no. 175, p. 705.

<sup>13</sup> [According to Plutarch, Cato the Elder, as censor, expelled Manilius from the Senate for having embraced his wife in front of his daughter.]

<sup>14</sup> [The capital of hell in Milton's *Paradise Lost* was called Pandemonium.]

<sup>15</sup> ['The raucous sound of infernal trumpets'. Tasso, *Jerusalem Delivered*, Chant iv, 3.]

<sup>16</sup> [The famous Declaration of Rights of Man and the Citizen was voted 19 August 1789.]

So can a durable government emerge from this bloody mire? To be sure the savage and licentious morals of barbarian peoples have not prevented their eventual civilization; barbarous ignorance has no doubt presided over the establishment of a number of political systems, but learned barbarism, systematic atrocity, calculated corruption, and, above all, irreligion have never produced anything. Greenness leads to maturity; rottenness leads to nothing.

Moreover, who has ever seen a government, and in particular a free constitution, originate despite its members and without their consent?<sup>17</sup> But this is the phenomenon that would be presented to us if this meteor called the *French Republic* could endure. This government is believed to be strong because it is violent; but strength differs from violence as much as from weakness, and its astonishing manner of operation at the present time is perhaps enough proof that it cannot last very long. The French nation does not *want* this government, but *suffers* it, and remains submissive either because it cannot choke it off or because it fears something worse. The government rests on only two columns, neither of which possesses any reality; we may say that it rests entirely on two negations. We may also notice that the apologists of the Republic do not try to demonstrate its worthiness; they easily sense that this is the weak point in their armour. They say only, as boldly as they can, that its survival is a possibility, and passing lightly over this argument as over hot coals, they devote themselves solely to proving to the French that they will expose themselves to the greatest evils if they return to their old form of government. On this topic they are quite eloquent; they never stop talking about the dangers of revolution. If pressed, these people will admit to you that the Revolution that created the present government was a crime, provided that you grant them it is unnecessary to make a new one. They throw themselves on their knees before the French nation, they beg it to preserve the Republic. One senses in everything that they say about the stability of this government not reasoned conviction, but the dreams of desire.

Let us pass on to the great anathema that burdens the Republic.

<sup>17</sup> [Probably a reference to the Vendémiaire uprising (October 1795), which was in protest against the 'two-thirds' decree, whereby two-thirds of the members of the new assemblies of the Directory had to be chosen from among the members of the old Convention.]

## CHAPTER FIVE

# The French Revolution Considered in its Antireligious Character

### Digression on Christianity

There is a satanic quality to the French Revolution that distinguishes it from everything we have ever seen or anything we are ever likely to see in the future. Recall the great assemblies, Robespierre's speech against the priesthood, the solemn apostasy of the clergy, the desecration of objects of worship, the installation of the goddess of reason, and that multitude of extraordinary actions by which the provinces sought to outdo Paris. All this goes beyond the ordinary circle of crime and seems to belong to another world.

Even now, when the Revolution has become less violent, and wanton excesses have disappeared, the principles remain. Have not the *legislators* (I use their term) passed the historically unique rule that the nation *will support no form of worship*?<sup>1</sup> Some of our contemporaries, it seems to me, have at certain moments reached the point of hating the Divinity; but this frightful act of violence was not necessary to render the very greatest creative efforts useless. The mere omission (let alone contempt) of the great Being in any human endeavour brands it with an irrevocable anathema. Either every imaginable institution is founded on a religious concept or it is only a passing phenomenon. Institutions are strong and durable to the degree that they are, so to speak, *deified*. Not only is human reason, or what is ignorantly called *philosophy*, incapable of supplying these foundations, which with equal ignorance are called *superstitious*, but philosophy is, on the contrary, an essentially disruptive force.

<sup>1</sup> [A decree of 29 September 1795 on the exercise of worship.]

In short, man cannot act the Creator without putting himself in harmony with Him. Mad as we are, if we want a mirror to reflect the image of the sun, would we turn it towards the earth?

These reflections are addressed to everyone, to the believer as well as to the sceptic; this is a fact that I advance and not a theory. Whether one laughs at religious ideas or venerates them does not matter; true or false, they nevertheless form the unique basis of all durable institutions.

Rousseau, perhaps the most self-deceived man who ever lived, nevertheless hit on this observation without wishing to draw the consequences from it.

'The Judaic Law,' he says, 'which is still in existence, and the Law of the child of Ishmael, which for ten centuries has regulated the conduct of half the world, bear witness, even today, to the great men who gave them form. . . . Prideful philosophy or the blind spirit of party sees in them only lucky impostors.'<sup>2</sup> He had only to draw the logical conclusion from this, instead of talking to us of 'that great and powerful genius who watches over durable institutions',<sup>3</sup> as if this poetry explained anything.

When we reflect on the attested facts of all history, when we understand that in the chain of human institutions, from those that have marked the great turning points in history down to the smallest social organization, from empires down to brotherhoods, all have a divine foundation, and that human power, whenever it isolates itself, can only give its works a false and passing existence, what are we to think of the new French structure and the power that produced it? For myself, I will never believe in the fecundity of nothingness.

It would be curious to examine our European institutions one by one and to show how they are all *Christianized*, how religion mingles in everything, animates and sustains everything. Human passions may pollute and even pervert primitive creations, but if the principle is divine, this is enough to give them a prodigious permanence. The military orders are an example from among hundreds that might be cited.<sup>4</sup> Certainly it would imply no lack of respect for their members to affirm that the original religious objective may no longer be their

<sup>2</sup> *Contrat social*, bk. II, ch. vii.

<sup>3</sup> [Ibid.]

<sup>4</sup> [The last of the great crusading orders, the Knights of Malta, was still in existence when Maistre wrote. It was suppressed in 1810.]



primary concern. Nevertheless they continue to exist, and their longevity is a wonder. How many superficial wits laugh at this strange amalgam of monk and soldier? It would be better to go into ecstasies over the hidden force by which these orders have survived the centuries, overcoming formidable opponents and withstanding the most astounding assaults in history. Moreover, this force is the *name* on which these institutions are based, for nothing *is* only through *the One who is*. In the midst of the general upheaval of which we are the witnesses, friends of order are especially disquieted by educational deficiencies. They are often heard to say that the Jesuits must be reestablished. Without disputing the merits of this order, one may say that this suggestion for their reestablishment indicates a lack of deep reflection. Do they mean that St Ignatius is at hand ready to serve our purposes? If the order were destroyed, perhaps it could be reestablished by some lay brother with the same inspiration that created it originally, but all the sovereigns in the world would never succeed.<sup>5</sup>

This is a divine law as certain and as palpable as the laws of motion. Every time a man puts himself, according to his abilities, in harmony with the Creator and produces any institution whatsoever in the name of the Divinity, then no matter what his individual weaknesses, ignorance, poverty, obscurity of birth, in short, his absolute lack of ordinary human resources, he participates in some manner in the power whose

<sup>5</sup> [Maistre's original manuscript continued as follows: 'The more one examines things closely, the more one will be convinced that the social edifice rests entirely on the cross and that what still saves us from a general upheaval is that the various governments in this part of the world, perhaps by instinct and habit rather than by conviction or wisdom, continue to maintain the religious establishment. In France, the culpable foolishness of the government having favoured the spread of impiety or indifference become too generalized, we see the consequences.

'Whenever education ceases to be religious, there is no longer national education. You will still make mathematicians, physicists, etc., but it is a question of making men. Moreover, a proper system of education to create real public spirit will be religious or it will not accomplish anything.

'Religion surrounds us on all sides; everything speaks its language to us. Its characters are imprinted on our flags, our coinage, our medals of honour, our ornaments, our buildings, and all our monuments. It animates, vivifies, perpetuates, and infuses our legislation. It sanctions our customs; it presides over our treaties. It has formed the great European family. Its gentle laws calmed our ferocity and helped unite our divergent spirits. From St Petersburg to Madrid, people made contracts in the name of the very holy and indivisible trinity. It was the great family title and the proof of a common kinship. The hideous hand of revolutionary genius came to efface this sacred formula, and it has destroyed . . .']

instrument he has made himself. He produces works whose strength and permanence astonish reason.

I ask every attentive reader of good will to look around him, for he will find these great truths demonstrated in even the smallest examples. One need not go back to the *son of Ishmael*, to Lycurgus, to Numa, or to Moses, whose laws were entirely religious; a popular festival, a rustic dance, will suffice for the observant. We still see in some Protestant countries certain gatherings, certain popular occasions that no longer have any apparent reason but that come down from Catholic usages which have been completely forgotten. Holidays of this kind have nothing moral, nothing respectable in themselves; it makes no difference, for they derive, however remotely, from religious ideas, and this is enough to perpetuate them. Three centuries have not been able to erase their memory.

But you, masters of the earth – princes, kings, emperors, powerful majesties, invincible conquerors – simply try to make the people go on such-and-such a day each year to a given place to dance. I ask little of you, but I dare give you a solemn challenge to succeed, whereas the humblest missionary will succeed and be obeyed two thousand years after his death. Every year the people gather around some rustic temple in the name of St John, St Martin, St Benedict, etc.; they come, animated by a feverish and yet innocent eagerness; religion sanctifies their joy and the joy embellishes religion; they forget their troubles; on leaving they think of the pleasure that they will have on the same day the following year, and the date is set in their minds.<sup>6</sup>

Beside this picture, put that of the masters of France, who have been invested with every power by an unprecedented revolution and who are unable to organize a simple holiday. They pour out money, they call all the arts to their assistance, and the citizens remain at home, taking notice of the call only to laugh at the organizers. Listen to this description of impotence. Listen to the memorable words of one of these *deputies of the people* speaking at a session of the Convention in January 1796:<sup>7</sup> 'What then! Men foreign to our ways, our usages, have been able to establish ridiculous feasts for unknown

<sup>6</sup> 'Let them limit those public displays provided for the entertainment of the populace to singing and instrumental recitals . . . and thus let them render that delight consonant with the honour of the gods.' Cicero, *De Legibus*, II, 9.

<sup>7</sup> [Maistre gives the wrong date; the discussion in question took place in 1795.]



events, to honour men whose very existence is problematic. What! They have been able to secure the employment of immense funds for the dull daily repetition of insignificant and often absurd ceremonies. And the men who have overthrown the Bastille and the throne, the men who have defeated Europe, will not succeed in preserving by national holidays the memory of the great events that immortalize our revolution.<sup>7</sup>

Delirium! The depths of human weakness! Legislators, meditate on this great admission that teaches you what you are and what you can do. Now what more do you need to judge the French system? If its nullity is not clear, nothing is certain in this world.

I am so convinced of the truths I defend that when I consider the general weakening of moral principles, the divergence of opinions, the shaking of spineless monarchies, the immensity of our needs, and the poverty of our means, it seems to me that all true philosophy must opt between these two hypotheses: either a new religion is going to come into existence or Christianity will be rejuvenated in some extraordinary way. You must choose between these two suppositions according to the position you have taken on the truth of Christianity.

This conjecture will be scornfully rejected only by those short-sighted men who believe only what they can see. Who in antiquity could have foreseen Christianity? And in its beginnings, what man unfamiliar with this religion could have foreseen its success? How do we know that a great moral revolution has not already begun? Pliny, as his famous letter proves, had not the slightest appreciation of the giant whose infancy he witnessed.<sup>8</sup>

But a crowd of ideas overwhelms me at this point and pushes me to the very broadest considerations.

The present generation is witnessing one of the greatest spectacles ever beheld by human eyes; it is the fight to the death between Christianity and philosophism.<sup>9</sup> The lists are open, the two enemies have come to grips, and the world looks on. As in Homer, *the father of gods and men* is holding the balance in which these two great causes are being weighed; one of the scales will soon descend.

To the prejudiced man, and especially to the one whose heart has convinced his head, events prove nothing; he having taken one side

<sup>8</sup> [Pliny the Younger (62–120), named governor of Bithynia, wrote to the Emperor Trajan to ask him what attitude to take towards the Christians.]

<sup>9</sup> [Maistre used the word *philosophisme* to refer to the philosophy of the philosophes.]



or the other irrevocably, observation and reasoning are equally useless. But all you men of good faith who may deny or doubt what I say, perhaps the great example of Christianity will settle your uncertainty. For eighteen centuries it has ruled a great part of the world, particularly the most enlightened portion of the globe. This religion even predates antiquity, for it is linked through its founder to another order of things, to an archetypal religion, that preceded it. The one cannot be true without the other being so; the one boasts of promising what the other boasts of having, so that this religion, by a chain that is a visible fact, goes back to the beginning of the world: *It was born the day the days were born.*<sup>10</sup>

Such duration is without example, and even taking Christianity by itself, no institution in the world can match it. To compare it to other religions is mere wrangling; several striking characteristics exclude all comparison. This is not the place to list them; just a word will be enough. Who can show us one other religion founded on miracles and revealing incomprehensible dogmas, yet believed for eighteen centuries by the greater part of mankind and defended down through the ages by the greatest men of each era from Origen<sup>11</sup> to Pascal, despite the utmost efforts of an enemy sect that, from Celsus<sup>12</sup> to Condorcet, has never ceased its bellowing?

How remarkable that when we reflect on this institution, the most natural hypothesis, the one suggested by every probability, is that of divine origin! If this is a human creation there is no longer any way to explain its success; by excluding the miracle you require more miracles.

They say that the nations have mistaken copper for gold. Very well, but has this copper been thrown into the European crucible and been subject to chemical observation for eighteen centuries? And is the result of this test in its favour? Newton believed in the Incarnation, but Plato, I think, put little stock in the miraculous birth of Bacchus. Christianity has been preached by the ignorant and believed by the scholars, and in this respect it is absolutely unique.

<sup>10</sup> [Louis Racine, *La Religion* (poem), Chant III, verse 36. Maistre used the same line, 'Elle naquit le jour où naquirent les jours', in a memoir on Freemasonry which he wrote in 1782. See 'Mémoire au duc de Brunswick', in *Ecrits maçonniques de Joseph de Maistre*, ed. Jean Rebotton (Geneva: Slatkine, 1983), p. 97.]

<sup>11</sup> [Origen (185–254) was an early Father of the Church whose brilliant, but occasionally heterodox, writings Maistre greatly admired.]

<sup>12</sup> [Celsus was a second-century Platonist celebrated for his attacks on Christianity.]

Moreover, it has survived every test. They say that persecution is a wind that nourishes and spreads the flame of fanaticism. Very well, Diocletian favoured Christianity; but by this supposition Constantine should have stifled it, but this is not what happened. It has withstood everything – peace, war, scaffolds, triumphs, daggers, temptations, pride, humiliation, affluence, the night of the Middle Ages, and the bright daylight of the centuries of Leo X and Louis XIV. An all-powerful emperor, master of the greatest part of the known world, once used all the resources of his genius against it.<sup>15</sup> He omitted nothing in his attempt to revive the ancient beliefs, cleverly associating them with the Platonic ideas then in fashion. Hiding the rage that animated him under a mask of purely external tolerance, he used against the rival cult arms that no human creation had ever resisted: he exposed it to ridicule, impoverished its priesthood to bring it into contempt, and deprived it of every assistance that man is able to give his works; defamation, intrigues, injustice, oppression, ridicule, force, and cunning were all useless. The *Galilean* triumphed over Julian, *the philosophe*.

And finally, in our own time, the experiment is being repeated in still more favourable circumstances, and nothing is lacking to make it decisive. So pay close attention, all you for whom history has not been instruction enough. You say that the sceptre supported the tiara. Very well! The sceptre no longer counts on the world's stage; it has been broken and the pieces thrown in the mud. You wondered to what extent a rich and powerful priesthood could influence acceptance of the dogmas that it preached. I do not believe that it really had the power to make people believe, but let that pass. There are no longer any priests; they have been exiled, slaughtered, and debased; they have been despoiled, and those who have escaped the guillotine, the stake, daggers, fusillades, drownings, and deportation today receive the alms that formerly they themselves gave. You feared the force of custom, the ascendancy of authority, the illusions of the imagination. None of these things are left; there are no more customs, there are no more masters, each man's mind is his own. Philosophy having corroded the cement that united men, there are no longer any moral bonds. The civil authority, favouring with all its strength the

<sup>15</sup> [This is a reference to Julian the Apostate, who though raised a Christian, tried to reestablish paganism when he became emperor.]

overthrow of the old system, gives to the enemies of Christianity all the support that it once gave to Christianity itself. Every means imaginable to the human mind is used to combat the old national religion. These efforts are applauded and rewarded, and contrary efforts are regarded as crimes. There is no longer any reason to fear visual delights, always the first to deceive; displays of pomp and vain ceremonies no longer impress men before whom everything has been mocked for seven years. The churches are closed, or open only for the feverish discussions and drunken revels of an unbridled populace. The altars are overthrown, filthy animals have been paraded through the streets in bishop's vestments, chalices have been used in abominable orgies, and on the altars that the old faith surrounded with dazzling cherubim they have placed nude prostitutes. Philosophism no longer has any complaints to make; all the human chances are in its favour; everything has been done for it and against its rival. If it wins, it will not say like Caesar, *I came, I saw, I conquered*, but in the end it will have conquered; it can applaud and sit proudly on an overturned cross. But if Christianity emerges from this terrible ordeal purer and more vigorous, if the Christian Hercules, strong in his own strength, lifts up the son of the earth and crushes him in his arms, *patuit Deus*.<sup>14</sup> Frenchmen, make way for the very Christian king, carry him yourselves to his ancient throne, raise again his oriflamme, and let his coinage, ranging again from one pole to the other carry everywhere the triumphant device

CHRIST COMMANDS, HE REIGNS,  
HE IS THE VICTOR!<sup>15</sup>

<sup>14</sup> [God is open.]

<sup>15</sup> [On his own copy of the second edition (1797) of his work, Joseph de Maistre added the following note: '*Christus regnat, vincit, imperat* (motto on old French coinage). Until it reappears written in the sacred language, it will be possible to have in France something that we would have to hold in great respect; but there will never be FRANCE.' See Darcel ed., p. 117, n. a.]

CHAPTER SIX

On Divine Influence in Political  
Constitutions

Man can modify everything within the sphere of his activity, but he creates nothing: such is his law, in the physical world as in the moral world.

Undoubtedly a man may plant a seed, raise the tree, perfect it by grafting, and trim it a hundred different ways, but he would never imagine that he had the power to make a tree. How can he have imagined that he had the power to make a constitution? Would it be from experience? Let us see what experience teaches us.

All free constitutions known to men have been formed in one of two ways. Sometimes they have *germinated*, as it were, in an unconscious manner through the conjunction of a multitude of so-called fortuitous circumstances, and sometimes they have a single author who appears like a sport of nature and enforces obedience. In either case, here are the signs by which God warns us of our weakness and of the rights that He has reserved to Himself in the formation of governments:

1 No constitution is the result of deliberation. The rights of the people are never written, or at any rate, constitutive acts or fundamental written laws are never more than declaratory statements of anterior rights about which nothing can be said except that they exist because they exist.<sup>1</sup>

2 God, not having judged it appropriate to use supernatural means in this area, has at least so far circumscribed human action that in

<sup>1</sup> 'It would take a fool to ask who gave liberty to the cities of Sparta, Rome, etc. These republics did not receive their charters from men. God and nature gave them to them.' Sidney, *Disc. sur le gov.*, 1, 2. The author is not suspect. [Algernon Sidney, *Discourses Concerning Government* (London: 1698).]

the formation of constitutions circumstances do everything and men are only part of the circumstances. Commonly enough, even in pursuing one goal they attain another, as we have seen in the English constitution.

3 The rights of the *people*, properly so called, often enough proceed from the concessions of sovereigns and in this case can be verified historically; but the rights of the monarch and the aristocracy, at least their essential rights, those which we may call constitutive and *basic*, have neither date nor author.

4 Even these concessions of the sovereign have always been preceded by a state of affairs that made them necessary and that did not depend on him.

5 Although written laws are merely declarations of anterior rights, it is far from true that everything can be written down; in fact there are always some things in every constitution that cannot be written and that must be allowed to remain in dark and reverent obscurity on pain of upsetting the state.<sup>2</sup>

6 The more that is written, the weaker the institution becomes, and the reason for this is clear. Laws are only declarations of rights, and rights are declared only when they are attacked, so that a multiplicity of written constitutional laws proves only a multiplicity of conflicts and the danger of destruction.

This is why the most vigorous political system of secular antiquity was that of Sparta, in which nothing was written.

7 No nation can give itself liberty if it is not already free.<sup>3</sup> When a nation begins to reflect on its existence, its laws are already made. Human influence does not extend beyond the development of rights already existing but disregarded or disputed. If imprudent men overstep these limits with reckless reforms, the nation will lose what rights it had without attaining those it hopes for. From this follows the

<sup>2</sup> The wise Hume often noticed this. I will cite only the following passage: 'This [Parliament's right to remonstrate against the king] touched upon that circumstance in the English constitution which is most difficult, or rather altogether impossible, to regulate by laws, and which must be governed by certain delicate ideas of propriety and decency, rather than to any exact rule or prescription.' Hume, *History of England, Charles I*, ch. 53, note E. Thomas Payne [*sic*], as we know, is of another opinion. He claims that a constitution does not exist unless he can put it in his pocket.

<sup>3</sup> 'A people that has been accustomed to live under a prince preserves its liberties with difficulty, if by accident it has become free.' Machiavelli, *Discourses on Titus Livy*, bk. 1, ch. xvi.



necessity of innovating only rarely and always with moderation and trepidation.

8 When Providence decrees the more rapid formation of a political constitution, there appears a man invested with an indefinable power: he speaks and makes himself obeyed. But these marvellous men belong perhaps only to the world of antiquity and to the youth of nations. Whatever the case, the distinctive characteristic of these legislators par excellence is that they are kings or high nobles; there never has been nor can there ever be any exception to this.

This is why Solon's constitution was the most fragile of antiquity.<sup>4</sup> Athens' days of glory, which were so ephemeral,<sup>5</sup> were soon ended by conquest and tyranny, and Solon himself lived to see the Pisistratids.<sup>6</sup>

9 Even these legislators, notwithstanding their extraordinary power, only combine preexisting elements in the customs and character of a people; and this gathering together, this rapid formation that resembles creation, is accomplished only in the name of the Divinity. The polity and the religion are founded together; the legislator is scarcely distinguishable from the priest, and his public institutions consist principally in *ceremonies and religious holidays*.<sup>7</sup>

10 In one sense, liberty has always been the gift of kings,<sup>8</sup> for all free nations were established by kings. This is the general rule, and the exceptions that may be mentioned would also fall under the rule if they were examined closely.

11 There has never been a free nation that did not have in its natural constitution seeds of liberty as old as itself, nor has any nation, by writing constitutional laws, ever succeeded in developing rights other than those in its natural constitution.

<sup>4</sup> Plutarch clearly recognized this truth. 'Solon', he said, 'could not maintain a city in union and concord for long . . . because he had been born of ordinary stock, and not of the city's wealthiest, so of middle class only.' *Life of Solon*, Amyot's translation.

<sup>5</sup> 'The era of Athenian generals came to an end with Iphicrates, Chabrias, and Timotheus, and after the death of those eminent men no general in that city was worthy of notice.' Cornelius Nepos, *Life of Timotheus*, ch. iv. From the battle of Marathon to that of Leucade won by Timothy was only 114 years. That was the compass of the glory of Athens.

<sup>6</sup> [Pisistratus and then his sons succeeded Solon as tyrants of Athens.]

<sup>7</sup> Plutarch, *Life of Numa*.

<sup>8</sup> 'Nor is there any doubt that the same Brutus who earned such honour by expelling the haughty Tarquinius would have acted in an evil hour for the commonwealth had a premature eagerness for liberty led him to wrest power from any of the earlier kings.' Titus Livy, II, 1. The entire passage is well worth meditation.

12 No mere assembly of men can form a nation, and the very attempt exceeds in folly the most absurd and extravagant things that all the Bedlams of the world might put forth.<sup>9</sup>

To prove this proposition in detail, after what I said, would, it seems to me, be lacking in respect to the knowledgeable and paying too much honour to the ignorant.

13 I have spoken of one basic characteristic of true legislators. Another very remarkable feature, on which it would be easy to write a book, is that they are never what are called *scholars*: they do not write, they act on instinct and impulse more than on reasoning, and they have no other means of acting than a certain moral force that bends men's wills like grain before the wind.

I could say some interesting things in showing that this observation is only the corollary of a general truth of the highest importance, but I am afraid I digress. I would rather omit the intermediary arguments and pass on to the conclusions.

There is the same difference between political theory and constitutional laws as there is between poetics and poetry. The illustrious Montesquieu is to Lycurgus, in the intellectual hierarchy, what Batteux<sup>10</sup> is to Homer or Racine. Moreover, these two talents positively exclude each other, as can be seen by the example of Locke, who fumbled badly when he presumed to give laws to the Americans.<sup>11</sup>

I have heard a great supporter of the Republic seriously lamenting that the French had not found in Hume's works a piece entitled *Plan for a Perfect Republic. O coecae hominum mentes*.<sup>12</sup> If you see an ordinary man of good sense who has never shown in any way any external sign of superiority, you cannot be sure that he would not be a good legislator. There is no reason to say yes or no. But if it is a question of Bacon, Locke, or Montesquieu, etc., you can say no without hesitation, for the one talent they do possess proves that they do not have the other.<sup>13</sup>

<sup>9</sup> 'It is even necessary that he whose mind has conceived a constitution should be alone in carrying it into effect.' Machiavelli, *Discourses on Titus Livy*, bk. 1, ch. ix.

<sup>10</sup> [Charles Batteux (1713–80) was a grammarian and translator who published an edition of Aristotle's *Poetics*.]

<sup>11</sup> [As secretary to the earl of Shaftesbury, one of the proprietors of Carolina, Locke helped his patron draw up the *Fundamental Constitutions of the colony* in 1669. This constitution was rejected by the colonists in 1693].

<sup>12</sup> [Oh how blind are the minds of men.]

<sup>13</sup> Plato, Zeno, and Chrysippus made books, but Lycurgus acted (Plutarch, *Life of Lycurgus*). There is not a single sane idea in morals or politics that escaped Plutarch's good sense.



The application to the French constitution of the principles that I have just stated follows naturally; but it is well to look at the matter from a particular viewpoint.

The greatest enemies of the French Revolution must frankly admit that the commission of eleven that produced the last constitution would appear to have had more sense than its work, and it perhaps did everything that could have been done. Working with recalcitrant materials, it was not able to follow principles, but the division of powers alone, even though the division is only that of a wall,<sup>14</sup> is nevertheless a fine victory over the prejudices of the moment.

But it is not only a question of the intrinsic merits of the constitution. My intention does not include investigating the particular faults that assure us that it cannot last; besides, everything has been said on this point. I will only indicate the theoretical error that has served as the basis for this constitution and that has misled the French from the very beginning of their revolution.

The Constitution of 1795, like its predecessors, was made for man. But there is no such thing as man in the world. In my lifetime I have seen Frenchmen, Italians, Russians, etc.; thanks to Montesquieu, I even know that *one can be Persian*. But as for *man*, I declare that I have never in my life met him; if he exists, he is unknown to me.

Is there a single country in the world where you can find a Council of Five Hundred, a Council of Elders, and five Directors? This constitution might be offered to any human association from China to Geneva. But a constitution that is made for all nations is made for none; it is a pure abstraction, an academic exercise made according to some hypothetical ideal, which should be addressed to man in his imaginary dwelling place.

What is a constitution? Is it not merely the solution of the following problem? *Given the population, the mores, the religion, the geographic situation, the political circumstances, the wealth, the good and the bad qualities of a particular nation, to find the laws that suit it.*

Now the Constitution of 1795, which treats only of man, does not grapple with this problem at all.

Thus every imaginable reason combines to prove that this work does not possess the divine seal. It is only a *school composition*.

Consequently, already at this moment, how many signs of decay!

<sup>14</sup> 'Under no circumstances may the two Councils meet in one and the same hall.' *Constitution de 1795*, Title v, article 60.

## CHAPTER SEVEN

### Evidence of the Incapacity of the Present French Government

A legislator resembles the Creator by not working all the time; he creates and then he rests. All true legislative action has its *Sabbath*, and intermittence is its distinctive characteristic. Ovid thus announced a truth of the first order when he said *Quod caret alterna requie durabile non est*.<sup>1</sup>

If perfection were an attribute of human nature, each legislator would speak only once; but since all our works are imperfect, in the measure that political institutions deteriorate, the sovereign is obliged to support them with new laws. Nevertheless, human legislation should resemble its model by this intermittence of which I have just spoken. As honoured by its repose as by its original action, the more it acts, the more human and the more fragile its work.

Look at the labours of the three French national assemblies. What a prodigious number of laws!

From 1 July 1789 to October 1791, the National Assembly passed	2,557
The Legislative Assembly, in 11½ months, passed	1,712
The National Convention, from the first day of the Republic to 4 Brumaire of the Year IV (26 October 1795), passed in 57 months	11,210
	<hr/>
	15,479 <sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Ovid, *Heroides*, iv, 89. [That which lacks its alternations of repose will not endure.]

<sup>2</sup> This calculation, which was made in France, is reported in a foreign gazette for February 1796. This number of 15,479 in less than six years appeared to me to be honest enough, when I found in my notes the assertion from one of those scintillating

I doubt that the three French royal houses ever produced such a collection. When one reflects on this infinite number of laws, one experiences in turn two very different sentiments. The first is that of admiration or at least astonishment. With Mr Burke, one is surprised that this nation, whose levity is proverbial, has produced such obstinate workers.<sup>3</sup> Such a structure of laws is a stupefying monument of Atlantean proportions. But astonishment immediately becomes pity when one thinks of the nullity of these laws, and one sees mere children killing each other to build a house of cards.

Why so many laws? Because there is no legislator. What have these so-called legislators done in six years? Nothing, for *to destroy* is not *to make*.

It is hard to imagine the unbelievable spectacle of a nation giving itself three constitutions in five years. A real legislator does not fumble around; he says *fiat* and the machine goes. Despite the various efforts the three assemblies have made in this matter, everything has gone from bad to worse since the assent of the nation to the work of the legislators has been steadily decreasing.

Certainly the Constitution of 1791 was a vain monument to folly; nevertheless, it must be admitted that it enthralled the French and that the majority of the nation wholeheartedly, if foolishly, swore an oath to *the nation, the law, and the king*. The French were so taken with this constitution that even after it was no longer a practical question, it was common enough to hear them argue *that in order to return to the real monarchy it would be necessary to go back to the Constitution of 1791*. Which is really equivalent to saying that to return to Europe from Asia it is necessary to go by way of the moon; but I am merely setting out the facts.<sup>4</sup>

sheets (*Quotidienne*, 30 November 1796, no. 218) by a very pleasant journalist who was absolutely sure that the French republic possessed two million and some hundreds of thousands of printed laws and eighteen hundred thousand that are not printed. I will not argue the point.

<sup>3</sup> [Probably a reference to Edmund Burke's *Reflections on the Revolution in France*, a work that Maistre read and admired.]

<sup>4</sup> An intelligent man who had his reasons for praising that constitution and who was very sure that it was *a monument of written reason* nevertheless agreed that, without mentioning the horror of two chambers and the restriction of the *veto*, it contained *several other anarchical principles* (20 or 30 for example). See *Coup d'oeil sur la Révolution française, par un ami de l'ordre et des lois*, by M.M. [General Montesquiou], Hamburg, 1794, pages 28 and 77.

But what follows is even more curious. *This constitution*, the author says, *sins not by*



Condorcet's constitution was never tested and was never worth trying;<sup>5</sup> the one that was preferred, the work of a few cutthroats,<sup>6</sup> still pleases similar men, and this phalanx, thanks to the Revolution, is numerous enough in France. So all things considered, of the three, the present constitution has the fewest supporters. In the primary assemblies that accepted it (according to the government) many members naively wrote, *accepted for want of something better*. This in effect is the general disposition of the nation: people submit through lassitude, through despair of finding anything better. Overwhelmed by an excess of misfortunes, they thought they could gain a breathing spell under this frail tree; they preferred a bad port to an angry sea. But nowhere does one sense conviction or sincere consent. If this constitution really suited the French, the invisible efficacy of experience would be winning new supporters every day; but what is happening is precisely the opposite. Democracy loses a new deserter every minute. Fear and apathy are all that guard the Pentarchy's throne,<sup>7</sup> and the most clairvoyant and disinterested travellers who have been to France all agree that *it is a republic without republicans*.

But if, as has been so often preached to kings, the strength of a government resides entirely in the love of its subjects, if fear alone is an insufficient means of maintaining sovereignty, what must we think of the French Republic?

Open your eyes and you will see that it does not *live*. What an enormous machine! What a multiplicity of springs and clockwork! What a fracas of pieces clanging away! What an immense number of men employed to repair the damage! Everything tells us there is nothing natural in these movements, for the primary characteristic of

*what it includes but by what it lacks*. Ibid., p. 27. Which is to say that the Constitution of 1791 would have been perfect if it had been made; this is the Apollo of the Belvedere, less the statue and the pedestal.

<sup>5</sup> [Condorcet was the reporter for a constitutional committee named by the Convention in October 1792.]

<sup>6</sup> [After the expulsion of the Girondins by the radical Jacobins in early June 1793, five Jacobins were added to the constitutional committee. The result of the committee's labours was the Constitution of the Year II, which was adopted by the Convention on 24 June 1793. However, the implementation of this constitution, which was the most democratic of the Revolution, was postponed because of the emergency situation, and finally forgotten. The Constitution of 1795, a much more conservative document, was drawn up in the closing months of the Convention.]

<sup>7</sup> [Maistre's reference is to the five Directors who formed the executive of the government.]

the creations of nature is power accompanied by an economy of means. Everything being in its place, there are no jerks or bumps, friction is low, and there is no noise, only majestic silence. So it is that in the mechanism of nature, perfect balance, equilibrium, and exact symmetry of parts give even rapid movement the satisfying appearance of repose.

Therefore sovereignty does not exist in France. Everything is artificial and violent, and it all announces that such an order of things cannot last.

Modern philosophy is at the same time too materialistic and too presumptuous to perceive the real mainsprings of the political world. One of its follies is to believe that an assembly can constitute a nation, that a *constitution*, that is to say, the totality of fundamental laws that are proper to a nation and that give it such-and-such a form of government, is an artifact like any other, requiring only intelligence, knowledge, and practice, that one can learn the *trade of constitution-making*, and that any day they think about it, men may say to other men, *make us a government*, as they say to a workman, *make us a steam pump or a stocking frame*.

Nevertheless, it is a truth as certain in its way as a mathematical proposition that *no great human institution results from deliberation* and that human works are fragile in proportion to the number of men involved in their construction and to the degree to which science and reasoning have been employed a priori.

A written constitution, such as that which rules the French today, is only an automaton possessing merely the exterior appearance of life. Man, by his own powers, is at most a Vaucanson; to be a Prometheus, he must climb to heaven, for *the legislator cannot gain obedience either by force or by reasoning*.<sup>8</sup>

At the moment, the experiment may be said to be over, for to say that the constitution is *working* would be inattentively to mistake the constitution for the government. The latter, which is a highly advanced despotism, works only too well, but the constitution exists only on paper. It is observed or violated according to the interests of the rulers; the people count for nothing, and the insults that their masters address to them under the forms of respect are well suited to cure them of their errors.

<sup>8</sup> Rousseau, *Contrat social*, bk. II, ch. vii. One must keep a close watch on this man and surprise him whenever he absent-mindedly lets the truth slip out.

The life of a government is something as real as the life of a man; one senses it, or better, one sees it, and no one is deceived on this point. I beseech every Frenchman who has a conscience to ask himself if it does not take some effort to give his representatives the title of *legislators*, if this title of etiquette and *courtesy* does not cost him the kind of effort he experienced when, under the old regime, he was pleased to call the son of a royal secretary *count* or *marquis*?<sup>9</sup>

*All honour comes from God*, said Homer of old;<sup>10</sup> he spoke exactly like St Paul, without having plagiarized him. One thing certain is that man cannot impart that indefinable characteristic that is called *dignity*. *Honour* belongs preeminently to the sovereign alone; from him, as from an immense reservoir, it is bestowed in proper number, weight, and measure on various classes and individuals.

I notice that when a member of the legislature spoke of his RANK in a pamphlet, the newspapers mocked him, because in effect there is no *rank* in France, but only *power*, which merely depends on force. The people see a deputy as only the seven-hundred-and-fiftieth part of a power capable of doing a great deal of harm. A deputy is respected not because he is a *deputy* but because he is respectable. Everyone would undoubtedly like to have given M Siméon's speech on divorce, but everyone wishes that he had given it before a legitimate assembly.<sup>11</sup>

Perhaps it is an illusion on my part, but this *wage* that a vainglorious neologism calls an *indemnity* seems to me to prejudice the French system of representation. The Englishman, free by law and independent by fortune, who comes to London to represent the nation at his own expense, has something imposing about him. But these French *legislators* who charge the nation five or six million livres to make laws for it, these *decree-sellers* who exercise the national sovereignty for

<sup>9</sup> [Anyone with enough money could purchase the office of royal secretary (*Secrétaire du Roi*), which carried with it hereditary nobility. The office was despised by the older nobility because it demeaned their own status.]

<sup>10</sup> *Iliad*, 1, 178. [As Darcel notes, this is a somewhat strained translation of Homer's Greek. See Darcel ed., p. 130, n. 12.]

<sup>11</sup> [Joseph-Jérôme Siméon (1749–1842), a former law professor who had lost his post during the Revolution for his opposition to the Civil Constitution of the Clergy, was elected to the Council of Five Hundred during the Directory. His speech to the Council of Elders, 24 January 1797, argued that divorce introduced a kind of prostitution. Arrested in the *coup d'état* of Fructidor, Siméon survived to fill important positions under subsequent regimes.]

eight *myriagrammes* of grain per day and who live off their legislative power – such men are not, in truth, very impressive, and when one comes to ask what they are worth, the imagination cannot help evaluating them in wheat.

In England, these two magic letters, MP, added to a little-known name suddenly exalt it and give it the right to a distinguished marriage. In France, a man who would intrigue for a deputy's place in order to gain an otherwise unlikely marriage would most probably be reckoning poorly. This is because any representative, any instrument whatever, of a false sovereignty can excite only curiosity or terror.

Such is the incredible weakness of isolated human power that it is not even capable of establishing a style of dress. How many reports were made to the Legislative Assembly on the costumes of its members? Three or four at least, but it was always in vain. Pictures of these beautiful costumes are sold in foreign countries, while in Paris public opinion ridicules them.

An ordinary costume, contemporaneous with a great event, can be consecrated by that event; it will then have a mark of distinction that will sustain it in the world of fashion. While other styles change, it will remain the same, always respected. This is more or less the way that costumes of great dignity originate.

For those who notice all sorts of things, it may be interesting to observe that of all the revolutionary finery, the only items that have had a consistent popularity are the sash and plume, and these come from chivalry. These survive, although blighted like trees from which the nourishing sap has been cut off but which have not yet lost their beauty. The *public official* laden with these dishonoured symbols is something like a robber conspicuous in the clothes of the man he has just stripped.

I am not sure how well I read, but I read the nullity of this government everywhere. Conquests by the French have drawn a great deal of attention and created illusions about the prospects of their government; even the best minds are dazzled by the glamour of these military successes, and so they do not at first perceive to what degree these successes have nothing to do with the stability of the Republic.

Nations have conquered under all possible forms of government, and even revolutions, by exalting morale, may lead to victories. The French will always succeed in war when under a firm government



that has the wit to praise them while despising them and that throws them at the enemy like bullets while promising them epitaphs in the newspapers.

Even now it is still Robespierre who is winning the battles; it is his iron despotism that leads the French to butchery and victory. It is by squandering gold and blood, it is by straining every resource that the masters of France have obtained the successes we witness. A superlatively brave nation exalted by any kind of fanaticism, and led by able generals, will always conquer, but it will pay dearly for its conquests. Did the Constitution of 1793 receive the seal of longevity from its three years of victory? Why should it be otherwise for that of 1795, and why should victory give this one a character that it was unable to give the other?

Moreover, a nation's character always remains the same. Barclay, in the sixteenth century, succinctly described the military character of France. 'It is a nation', he said, 'supremely brave and invincible on its own soil; but when it expands beyond its borders it is quite another thing. This is why it has never been able to retain dominion over foreign peoples and why its strength is its own misfortune.'<sup>12</sup>

No one feels more strongly than I that the present circumstances are extraordinary and that it is very possible that what has always happened before will not happen this time; but this question is irrelevant to the purpose of this work. It suffices for me to indicate the falsity of the argument that *the republic is victorious, therefore it will last*. If it were absolutely necessary to prophesy, I would rather say that *war keeps it alive, therefore peace will kill it*.

The inventor of a system of physics would undoubtedly congratulate himself if he had all the facts of nature in his favour; I can cite in support of my reflections all the facts of history. Examining in good faith all the examples history furnishes us, I see nothing favouring this chimerical system of deliberation and political construction by abstract reasoning. At the most one could mention America, but I have replied in advance to this by saying that the time has not yet come to cite it. I will, however, add a few comments.

- 1 British America had a king but never saw him; the splendour of monarchy was foreign to it, and its sovereign was a kind of supernatural power that was never really felt.

<sup>12</sup> J. Barclaius, *Icon Animorum*, cap. III. [John Barclay (1582-1621) was an English writer best known for his controversy with Bellarmine over the power of the pope.]

- 2 It possessed the democratic element that existed in the constitution of the mother country.
- 3 It possessed, besides, those democratic elements that were carried hither by a multitude of its early colonists, who were born amid political and religious troubles and were almost all republican-minded.
- 4 The Americans built with these elements and on the plan of three powers that they received from their ancestors, and not at all *tabula rasa*, as the French did.

But all those things that are really new in their government, all those things that are the result of popular deliberation, are the most fragile parts of the system; one could scarcely combine more symptoms of weakness and decay.

Not only do I doubt the stability of the American government, but the particular establishments of English America inspire no confidence in me. The cities, for example, animated by a hardly respectable jealousy, have not been able to agree as to where the Congress should meet; none of them wanted to concede the honour to another. In consequence, they have decided to build a new city to be the capital. They have chosen a very favourable location on the banks of a great river and decreed that the city should be called *Washington*. The sites of all the public buildings have been marked out, the work has begun, and the plan of this queen city has already made the rounds in Europe. Essentially there is nothing in all this that surpasses human power; a city may easily be built. Nevertheless, there is too much deliberation, too much *humanity* in this business, and one could bet a thousand to one that the city will not be built, that it will not be called *Washington*, and that the Congress will not meet there.<sup>13</sup>

<sup>13</sup> [In his own copy of the 1797 edition of his work, Maistre added the following note: 'Washington is a city more designed than built. It will take another 50 years for it to count for something.' See Darcel ed., p. 134, n. 21.]

## CHAPTER EIGHT

### Of the Old French Constitution

#### Digression on the king and on his declaration to the French of July 1795<sup>1</sup>

People have held three different theories about the old French constitution: some have claimed that the nation had no constitution; others have claimed the contrary; and finally, others, taking a middle position, as usually happens on important questions, have claimed that the French really had a constitution, but that it was not observed.

The first view is indefensible; the other two do not really contradict each other.

The error of those who claim that France had no constitution stems from that great mistake about human power, prior deliberation, and written laws.

If a man of good faith, given only good sense and probity, were to ask what the old French constitution was, he could be answered boldly: 'It is what you sensed when you were in France; it is that mixture of liberty and authority, law and opinion that would lead the foreign traveller in France, even though he was subject to a monarchy

<sup>1</sup> [Louis XVIII's Declaration of Verona, issued in July 1795, after the prison death of Louis XVI's son, appeared hopelessly reactionary to contemporary French republicans and most moderate royalists. He called for punishment for the regicides responsible for Louis XVI's death (about half of the members of the Convention), return to the old constitution of an hereditary monarchy (but with a reform of abuses), reestablishment of Catholicism as the religion of state (though with toleration for other religions), restoration of the parlements as guardians of the law, reconstitution of the three Estates, and convocation of an Estates-General that might vote new taxes and present its petitions to the king (but the king would retain the right to dismiss it). The declaration did not mention the confiscated property of the Church and the *émigré* nobles, but most people assumed that Louis' intentions were to restore this property to its former owners.]

in his own country, to believe that he was now living under another government than his own.'

But if one wants to study the question more deeply, the characteristics and laws which ranked France above all known monarchies may be found in the corpus of French public law.

This monarchy possesses a certain theocratic element that is peculiarly its own and that has given it a lifespan of fourteen hundred years. There is nothing so national as this element. The bishops, successors to the druids in this respect, only perfected it.

I do not believe that any other European monarchy has employed, for the good of the state, a greater number of priests in its civil government. I think back to the pacific Fleury, to the Saint-Ouens, to the Saint-Legers,<sup>2</sup> and many others so distinguished for their political sense in the troubles of their times, veritable Orpheuses of France who tamed the tigers and made them follow in chains. I doubt whether one could find a parallel series anywhere.

But while the priesthood in France was one of the three pillars supporting the throne and played such an important role in the nation's councils, tribunals, ministries, and consulates, it had no influence, or very little influence, in civil administration, and even when a priest was first minister, France never had a *government of priests*.

Every influence was well balanced and everyone had his place. From this point of view it is England that most resembles France. If England ever banished the words *Church and State* from its political vocabulary, its government would perish just like that of its rival.

It was the fashion in France (for everything is a matter of fashion in that country) to say that Frenchmen were slaves; but why then was the word *citoyen*, a word that cannot be translated into other European languages, found in the French language even before the Revolution took it up in order to dishonour it? The younger Racine addressed this beautiful verse to the king of France in the name of his city of Paris: *Under a citizen king, every citizen is king*.

To praise a Frenchman's patriotism, one said *C'est un grand citoyen*. It is hopeless to try to use this expression in our other languages.

<sup>2</sup> [Cardinal Fleury was first minister in the early years (1726-43) of Louis XV's reign; Saint-Ouen (605-83), bishop of Rouen, was chancellor under Dagobert I; and Saint-Leger (616-78), bishop of Autun, was a councillor during the minority of Clotaire III.]

*Gross bürger* in German,<sup>3</sup> *gran cittadino* in Italian, etc., are simply not tolerable.<sup>4</sup> But we must go beyond generalities.

Several members of the old magistracy have collected and developed the principles of the French monarchy in an interesting book that would appear to merit the confidence of the French.<sup>5</sup>

These magistrates begin, as is proper, with the royal prerogative, and certainly there is nothing finer. 'The constitution attributes the legislative power to the king; all jurisdiction emanates from him. He has the right to dispense justice and to have it dispensed by his officials, to grant pardon, to bestow privileges and rewards, to establish offices, to confer nobility, to convoke and dismiss national assemblies whenever he judges it wise to do so, and to make peace and war and to call up the army.' (p. 28)

No doubt these are great prerogatives, but notice what the French constitution places on the other side of the balance.

'The king reigns only through the laws, and is powerless to act by mere whim.' (p. 364)

'There are laws that the kings themselves, as they have acknowledged in an expression that has become famous, are *happily powerless to violate*; these are the *laws of the realm*, in contrast to ordinary and nonconstitutional *royal laws*.' (pp. 29 and 30)

'Thus, for example, the succession to the crown is by the strict rule of male primogeniture. Marriages of princes of the blood made

<sup>3</sup> *Bürger*: *verbum humile apud nos et ignobile*. J.A. Ernesti, in *Dedicat, Opp. Ciceronii*, p. 79. [*Bürger*: a word which appears base and undistinguished.]

<sup>4</sup> Rousseau has an absurd note on this word *citoyen* in his *Contrat social*, bk. 1, ch. vi. He thoughtlessly accuses a very knowledgeable man (Bodin) of having made a clumsy blunder on this point, and Jean-Jacques makes clumsy blunders in every line; he shows, in fact, an equal ignorance of languages, metaphysics, and history. [Rousseau accused Bodin of having confused *bourgeois* and *citoyen* because Bodin did not limit *citoyen* to the narrow Genevan usage.]

<sup>5</sup> *Développement des principes fondamentaux de la monarchie française*, 1795. [This book was the work of a number of *émigré* magistrates of the parlements. It was written at Koblenz and Mannheim between the summer of 1791 and 1792 and submitted to the *émigré* princes in October 1792. Despite an adverse reaction from the princes, the authors published a revised version in 1795. Maistre erred in assuming that the book had Louis XVIII's approval; in fact, the king regarded it as a *résumé* of the claims of the parlements. The parlements' claim to a kind of veto power on royal legislative authority had been a matter of dispute between the crown and the high courts throughout the eighteenth century. The parlements are commonly blamed for obstructing the monarchy's reform efforts. But see William O. Doyle's 'The Parlements of France and the Breakdown of the Old Regime', *French Historical Studies*, Fall 1970, where the importance of the parlements as an obstacle to reform is discounted.]



without royal consent are invalid. If the reigning dynasty dies out, it is the nation that gives itself a king, etc.’ (pp. 263 ff.)

‘The kings, as supreme legislators, have always spoken affirmatively in publishing their laws. Nevertheless, there is also a consent of the people, although this consent is only an expression of the desire, the gratitude, and the acceptance of the nation.’<sup>6</sup> (p. 271)

‘Three orders, three chambers, three deliberations – this is the way the nation is represented. The result of these deliberations, if unanimous, manifests the will of the Estates-General.’ (p. 332)

‘The laws of the realm can be made only by the general assembly of all the realm with the common consent of the three estates. The prince may not derogate from these laws, and if he dares meddle with them, what he does may be revoked by his successor.’ (pp. 292 and 293)

‘The necessity of the consent of the nation in the establishment of taxes is an incontestable verity recognised by the kings.’ (p. 302)

‘The will of two orders cannot bind the third if the latter does not give its consent.’ (p. 302)

‘The consent of the Estates-General is necessary for the validity of any perpetual alienation of the domain, and the same surveillance is recommended to them to prevent any partial dismemberment of the domain.’ (pp. 3 and 4)

‘Justice is administered in the king’s name by the magistrates who examine the laws to see if they are contrary to the fundamental laws.’

It is part of their duty to resist the misguided will of the sovereign. It was in reference to this principle that the famous Chancellor l’Hospital<sup>7</sup> told the Parlement of Paris in 1561:

‘The magistrates must not allow themselves to be intimidated by the passing anger of a sovereign or by fear of disgrace, but must always remember their oath to obey the laws, which are the king’s true commands.’ (p. 345)

<sup>6</sup> If the intervention of the nation is examined closely, it will be found to be *less* than a colegislative power and *more* than simple consent. This is an example of the kind of thing that must be left in a certain obscurity and that cannot be submitted to human legislation. It is the *most divine part* of the constitution, if one may express it this way. It is often said that *it is only by making a law that we know where we stand*. Not always; there are reserved cases.

<sup>7</sup> [Michel de l’Hospital (1507–73) was chancellor of France from 1560 to 1568 during the French wars of religion.]



Louis XIV, halted by a double refusal by his parlement, desisted from an unconstitutional alienation. (p. 343)

Louis XIV solemnly recognised the right of free verification (p. 347) and ordered his magistrates *to disobey him under pain of disobedience* if he sent them orders contrary to the law (p. 345). This order was not a play on words: the king forbids obedience to the man; he has no greater enemy.

This superb monarch also ordered his magistrates to regard as null any letters patent bearing evocations or commissions for the judgement of civil or criminal cases, and *even to punish the bearers of these letters*. (p. 363)

The magistrates can exclaim, *Happy land where servitude is unknown* (p. 361). And it is a priest distinguished by his piety and knowledge (Fleury)<sup>8</sup> who wrote in explaining public law in France, 'In France, every individual is free; there is no slavery; there is freedom of domicile, travel, commerce, marriage, choice of profession, acquisitions, disposition of goods, and inheritance.' (p. 362)

'The military power must not interfere with civil administration.' *Provincial governors have nothing to do with the army, and they may use armed force only against the enemies of the state, not against the citizen, who is submissive to the justice of the state.* (p. 364)

'The magistrates are irremovable, and these important offices can be vacated only by the death of the holder, voluntary resignation, or judicial judgement.' (p. 356)<sup>9</sup>

'The king, in cases concerning his own interests, pleads against his subjects in the courts. It has been known for him to be condemned to pay the tithe on the fruits of his gardens, etc.' (p. 367 ff.)

If the French would look at themselves dispassionately and in good faith they would realise that this is enough, *perhaps more than enough* for a nation too noble to be enslaved and too impetuous to be free.

<sup>8</sup> [C. F. Fleury (1640–1723), a celebrated Gallican prelate, wrote the twenty-volume *Histoire ecclésiastique*, which Maistre often cited.]

<sup>9</sup> What is the point of declaiming so strongly against venality of office in the magistracy? If venality is seen as merely a means to hereditary tenure, the problem reduces itself to knowing whether, in a country such as France or such as France has been for two or three centuries, justice could be better administered than by hereditary magistrates. The question is very difficult to resolve; the enumeration of disadvantages is a deceptive argument. What is bad in a constitution, what may even destroy it, is nevertheless in fact a part of the constitution just as what is good. I recall a passage from Cicero: 'The tribunes of the plebs have too much power. Who can deny it? etc.' *De Legibus*, III, 10. [Cicero argues that every institution has its disadvantages as well as its advantages.]

Does someone say that these fine laws were not observed? In this case, it was the fault of the French, and they have no hope of liberty; for when a people does not know how to take advantage of their own fundamental laws it is useless to look for others. It is a sign that they are not fit for liberty or that they are irremediably corrupt.

But to counter these sinister ideas, I will cite, on the excellence of the French constitution, a witness who is unexceptionable from every point of view – that great statesman and ardent republican, Machiavelli.

‘There have been’, he says, ‘a great number of kings and very few good ones, I mean among absolute sovereigns. Among these, however, are not to be counted either the kings of Egypt in that ancient period when that country was governed by laws, or those of Sparta; neither those of France in modern times, for that country is more thoroughly regulated by laws than any other of which we have knowledge.’<sup>10</sup>

‘The kingdom of France’, he says elsewhere, ‘is content and tranquil, because the king has bound himself by a number of laws that provide for the security of his people. He who organised that government<sup>11</sup> wanted the kings to dispose of the army and treasury at their own will, but to conform to the laws in all other matters.’<sup>12</sup>

Who would not be struck to see how this powerful mind understood the fundamental laws of the French monarchy three centuries ago?

The French have been spoiled on this point by the English who have said, though without believing it themselves, that Frenchmen are slaves. Similarly the English told them that Shakespeare was better than Racine, and the French believed it. Even that honest judge, Blackstone, towards the end of his *Commentaries*, puts France on a par with Turkey. Here one would have to say with Montaigne, *One could not scoff enough at the impudence of this coupling.*

But when the English made their own revolution, at least in so far as they had one, did they suppress the kingship or the House of Lords in order to achieve liberty? Not at all. Rather they activated their old constitution and took their declaration of rights from it.

<sup>10</sup> *Discourses on Titus Livy*, bk. 1, ch. lviii.

<sup>11</sup> I should like to know who it was.

<sup>12</sup> *Discourses*, bk. 1, ch. xvi.

There is not a Christian nation in Europe that is not by right *free* or *free enough*. There is not one that does not have, in the purest examples of its legislation, all the elements of the constitution that suits it. But it is especially necessary not to fall into the enormous error of believing that liberty is something absolute, something not subject to more or less. Jupiter casts the lots of nations, *more to one and less to the other*, and man has nothing to do with this distribution.

Another very deadly error is to be attached too rigidly to old ways. No doubt they must be respected, but what jurists call the *last state* must always be considered. Every free constitution is by its nature flexible, and flexible in the proportion to which it is free; it would be foolish to try to restore it to its rudiments without sacrificing something.<sup>13</sup>

Everything proves that the French sought to surpass human power, that these disorderly efforts are leading them into slavery, that they only needed to recognise what they already possessed, and that if they are made for a greater degree of liberty than they enjoyed seven years ago (which is not at all clear) they have at hand in all the examples of their history and legislation everything they need to make them honoured and envied by all Europe.<sup>14</sup>

But if the French are made for monarchy and if it is only a question of establishing the monarchy on its true foundations, what error, what fatality, what disastrous prejudice could separate them from their legitimate king?

<sup>13</sup> 'All human governments, particularly those of mixed frame, are in continual fluctuation.' Hume, *History of England, Charles I*, ch. i.

<sup>14</sup> A man whose person and opinion I equally respect (Mallet du Pan), who does not agree with me on the old French constitution, has taken the trouble of developing his ideas in an interesting letter for which I am most appreciative. Among other things he objects that 'the book of the French magistrates, cited in this chapter, would have been burned under the reign of Louis XIV or Louis XV as prejudicial to the fundamental laws of the monarchy and the rights of the monarch'. I believe it; so would Mr Delolme's book (*On the English Constitution*) have been burned in London (perhaps with its author) under the reign of Henry VIII or his rude daughter.

When someone has taken a stand on great questions, with full knowledge of the cause, he rarely changes his mind. In the meantime, though I distrust my own prejudices as much as I must, I am sure of my own good faith. It should be noted that I cited no contemporary authorities in this chapter for fear that the most respectable might appear suspect. As to the magistrate authors of the *Développement des principes fondamentaux*, etc., if I used their work, it is just that I do not care to do what has been done, that the gentlemen cited certain documents, and this was precisely what I needed. [This note was added in the second edition. We do not have Mallet du Pan's letter.]

Hereditary succession in a monarchy is something so precious that every other consideration must give way before it. The greatest crime that a French royalist can commit is to see in Louis XVIII something other than his king or, by discussing the qualities of the man or his actions in an unfavourable way, to diminish the good will with which it is important to surround him. The Frenchman who would not blush to look into the past to find real or fancied mistakes would be very base and guilty. The accession to the throne is a new birth; one counts only from that instant.

If there is a commonplace in morals, it is that power and greatness corrupt men and that the best kings have been those who have been tried by adversity. So why do the French deprive themselves of the advantage of a prince formed by the terrible school of misfortune? How many reflections must the past six years provide him! How far removed from the intoxication of power! How ready he must be to undertake to rule gloriously and how inspired by worthy ambition! What prince in the world could have more motives, more desires and more means to bind up the wounds of France!

Have Frenchmen not tested the blood of the Capets long enough? They know from a six-century-long experiment that this blood is good, so why change? The head of this great family has shown himself by his declaration to be loyal, generous, and profoundly inspired by religious truths; no one disputes his natural intelligence and excellent education. There was a time, perhaps, when an unlettered king was acceptable; but in this century, when we believe in books, an educated king is an advantage. What is more important is that he cannot be presumed to hold any of those exaggerated ideas capable of alarming the French. Who can forget that they were displeased with him at Koblenz? That episode is greatly in his favour. In his declaration he spoke of *liberty*, and if someone objects that the word was used guardedly, one can reply that a king must not speak the language of revolution. A solemn discourse addressed to his people must be distinguished by a certain sobriety of expression and ideas that has nothing in common with a private citizen's hasty opinions. When the king of France has stated '*that the French constitution subjects the laws to consecrated constitutional forms and the sovereign himself to the observation of the laws in order to guard the legislator's wisdom against seductive pitfalls and to defend the liberty of subjects against the abuses of authority,*' he has said everything, since he has promised *liberty through the consti-*

*tution*. The king must not speak like some Parisian tribune. If the king has discovered that it is a mistake to speak of liberty as something absolute, that liberty is on the contrary something susceptible to more or less, and that the art of the legislator is not to make a people free, but *free enough*, he has discovered a great truth, and he must be praised for his moderation rather than blamed. A famous Roman, giving liberty to a people long habituated to freedom, told them, *Libertate modice utendum*.<sup>15</sup> What would he have said to the French? Surely the king in speaking soberly of liberty was thinking less of his own interests than of those of the French.

'The constitution,' the king continues, 'prescribes the conditions for the establishment of taxes in order to assure the people that the taxes they pay are necessary for the welfare of the State.' Therefore, the king does not have the right to impose them arbitrarily, and this avowal alone excludes despotism.

'It confides the registration of laws to the highest body of magistrates so that they may watch over their execution and so that they may enlighten the monarch's judgement if he has erred.' There you have registration of laws in the hands of the high magistracy; there you have the consecration of the right of remonstrance. And whenever a body of hereditary, or at least irremovable, magistrates has the constitutional right to warn the monarch, to elucidate his judgement, and to complain of abuses, there is no despotism.

'It places the fundamental laws under the safeguard of the king and the three orders so as to prevent revolution, the greatest calamity that can befall a people.'

Thus there is a constitution, since the constitution is only the collection of fundamental laws, and the king cannot touch these laws. If he tried to, the three orders would have a *veto* over him, as each of the orders has over the other two.

And surely it would be mistaken to accuse the king of having spoken too vaguely, for this vagueness is precisely the proof of the highest wisdom. The king would have acted very imprudently if he had posed bounds that would have prevented him from manoeuvring; it was an inspiration to reserve a certain latitude of execution for himself. Someday the French will agree, and admit that the king promised everything that he could have promised.

<sup>15</sup> Titus Livy, XXXIV, 49. ['They should use their liberty with discretion.' The exact citation reads *Libertate modice utantur*.]

Did Charles I find himself better off for having adhered to the propositions of the Scots? He was told, as Louis XVIII has been told, 'It is necessary to adapt to the times, to be flexible. *It is folly to sacrifice a crown to save the hierarchy.*' He believed it, and acted very badly. The king of France is wiser. How can the French be so obstinate as not to render him justice?

If this prince had been so foolish as to propose a new constitution to the French, then they could have accused him of indulging in perfidious vagueness, for in so doing he would have said nothing. If he had proposed a work of his own creation, there would only have been an outcry against him, and the outcry would have been well founded. By what right, in effect, could he command obedience once he abandoned the old laws? Is not arbitrariness a common domain to which everyone has equal right? There is not a young man in France who would not point out the faults in a new constitution and propose amendments. Look at the matter carefully and you will see that as soon as the king had abandoned the old constitution, he would have had only one thing left to say: 'I will do whatever you wish.' Translated into plain French, this is the indecent and absurd proposition to which the king's beautiful discourse would have been reduced. Does it really show serious thought to blame the king for not having offered the French a new revolution? Since the insurrections which began his family's dreadful misfortunes he has seen three constitutions accepted, sworn to, and solemnly consecrated. The first two lasted no time at all, and the third exists in name only. Should the king have offered his subjects five or six and let them take their choice? Certainly the first three cost enough that no sensible man would be advised to suggest another. But such a proposal, which would be folly on the part of a private citizen, would be foolish and criminal on the king's part.

No matter what he did, the king could not have made everyone happy. There would have been objections if he had published no declaration, there were objections to the one he published, and there would have been objections to any other. In a doubtful situation, he did well to stand on principle, offending only passion and prejudice in saying that *the French constitution would be his ark of the covenant*. If Frenchmen would examine this declaration dispassionately, I would be most surprised if they did not find there good reasons for respecting the king. In the terrible circumstances in which he found himself,



nothing could have been more attractive than the temptation to compromise on principle in order to reconquer the throne. So many people said and believed that the king was losing by his obstinate attachment to old ideas! It would have appeared so natural to listen to proposals of accommodation! Above all, it would have been so easy to accede to these proposals with the mental reservation to regain the old prerogative, not dishonestly, but relying on the force of things, that it took a great deal of frankness, nobility, and courage to tell Frenchmen, 'I cannot make you happy; I can, I must, reign only constitutionally: I will not meddle with the Lord's ark; I am waiting for you to come back to your senses; I am waiting until you have grasped this truth that is so simple and so self-evident and that you still obstinately reject, which is *that with the same constitution* I can give you a totally different regime.'

The king showed his wisdom by telling the French that *their old and sensible constitution was for him a sacred ark and that he was forbidden to alter it lightly*. However, he added that *he wanted to restore all its purity and vigour, which time had corrupted and weakened*. Once again, these are inspired words, for they clearly separate what pertains to human power from what belongs to God. There is not a single phrase in this too-unappreciated document that should not recommend the king to the French.

It is hoped that this impetuous nation, which knows how to return to the truth only after having exhausted error, will finally want to perceive a very palpable truth; this is that it is the dupe and victim of a small number of men who place themselves between the nation and its legitimate sovereign, from whom only benefits can be expected. Put things at their worst: *the king will allow the hand of justice to fall on some parricides; he will punish by humiliation some nobles who have displeased him*. Eh! What does this matter to you, good workman, industrious artisan, peaceable citizen, whoever you may be, to whom heaven has given obscurity and happiness? Remember that you, with your fellows, form almost the whole nation and that the entire people suffers all the evils of anarchy because a handful of scoundrels has made the nation afraid of the king whom they fear.

If Frenchmen continue to reject their king they will be allowing a uniquely auspicious occasion to elude them, and they will expose themselves to rule by force instead of crowning their legitimate sovereign themselves. How the king would cherish them and by what

efforts of zeal and love would he seek to repay their fidelity! The national will would always be before his eyes to inspire the great enterprise and the hard work that the regeneration of France demands of this leader, and every minute of his life would be consecrated to the happiness of Frenchmen.

But if they obstinately reject their king, do they know what their lot will be? Hardship has by now matured the French enough for them to understand a hard truth: the fact is that the neutral witness observing them in the midst of their frantic liberty is often tempted to cry out, like Tiberius, *O hominus ad servitutem natus!*<sup>16</sup> There are, as we know, several kinds of courage, and Frenchmen certainly do not possess them all. Intrepid in the face of the enemy they are less than brave before even the most unjust authority. Nothing equals the patience of this people that calls itself *free*. In five years they have been made to accept three constitutions and the revolutionary government. Tyrants succeeded one another and the people always obeyed. Not a single one of their efforts to extricate themselves from their predicament succeeded. Their masters have gone so far as to crush them by mocking them. They told the people, 'You believe that you do not want this law, but you can be sure that you do. If you dare refuse it, we will shoot you down with grapeshot to punish you for not wanting what you want.' And they did it.<sup>17</sup>

The French nation is no longer under Robespierre's frightful yoke, but this makes no difference. They may well congratulate themselves for having escaped this tyranny, but they have nothing to boast about. I am not sure that their time of servitude was more shameful than that of their emancipation. The history of the ninth of Thermidor is short: *a few scoundrels killed a few scoundrels*. If it had not been for this family quarrel, Frenchmen would still be groaning under the rule of the Committee of Public Safety.

And at this very moment, are not a small number of agitators still talking of putting one of the Orléans family on the throne? All that is lacking to the French is the opprobrium of seeing power given to the son of the tortured [prince] instead of to the brother of a martyr; and yet, nothing promises them that they will not suffer this humiliation if they do not hasten to come to back to their legitimate

<sup>16</sup> [Oh men born to servitude.]

<sup>17</sup> [An allusion to the Vendémiaire uprising of 5 October 1795, which young General Bonaparte put down with grapeshot.]

sovereign.<sup>18</sup> They have given such proof of their patience that there is no kind of degradation that they cannot expect. I suggest this is a great lesson, not only for the French people, who more than any other people in the world will always accept their masters and never choose them, but for the small number of good Frenchmen made influential by circumstances, to neglect nothing to save the nation from these degrading fluctuations by delivering it into the hands of the king. No doubt he is human, but do they expect to be governed by an angel? He is human, but today we are sure that he knows this, and this is a great deal. If the wish of Frenchmen were to place him on his father's throne, he would embrace his nation, and the nation would find in him everything it desired: goodness, justice, love, gratitude, and incontestable talents matured in the hard school of adversity.<sup>19</sup>

The French have appeared to pay little attention to the words of peace that he has addressed to them. They have not praised his declaration, they have even criticized it and probably they have forgotten it; but some day they will render him justice, some day posterity will refer to this statement as a model of royal wisdom, frankness, and style.

The duty of every good Frenchman at this moment is to work untiringly to direct public opinion in favour of the king and to present his every act in a favourable light. Royalists must examine their consciences severely on this point and permit themselves no illusions. I am not a Frenchman, I know nothing of their intrigues; I am not personally involved with these people. But supposing a French royalist said to me, 'I am ready to spill my blood for the king; however, without derogating from the loyalty I owe him, I cannot help but blame him, etc.,' I would tell him what his conscience would already be shouting: 'You are lying to the world and to yourself; if you were capable of sacrificing your life for the king, you could sacrifice your prejudices for him. Moreover, he does not need your life, he needs rather your prudence, your measured zeal, your passive devotion, even (to cover all possibilities) your indulgence. Keep your life, which he does not need at the moment, and give him those services he does

<sup>18</sup> [The first two sentences of this paragraph appeared in the early editions of the *Considerations*, but were suppressed in the 1821 and subsequent editions. See Darcel ed., p.149, n.a.]

<sup>19</sup> I will return to the interesting problem of amnesty in Chapter 10.

need. Do you think those who make the newspapers are the most heroic? On the contrary, the most obscure can be the most efficacious and the most sublime. It is not your pride that is at stake here; satisfy your conscience and Him who gave you a conscience.'

Just as threads which can be broken by a child at play can nevertheless be joined to form a cable capable of supporting the anchor of a great vessel, so a number of insignificant criticisms can create a formidable force. To combat these prejudices that somehow spring up and for some reason continue to flourish would be to serve the king well. Has not the king been reproached for inaction by men who should know better? Have not others haughtily compared him to Henry IV, observing that that great prince was quite able to find other means of regaining his throne than intrigues and declamations? But if one is going to be funny, why not reproach the king for not having conquered Germany and Italy as Charlemagne did and for not living there in great style while waiting for the French to listen to reason?

As to the more or less numerous party that is raising great outcries against the monarchy and monarch, it is animated by more than mere hate. It is worth analysing what is involved.

There is not an intelligent man in France who is not more or less disgusted with himself. Every heart is burdened by the nation's ignominy (for never was a people despised by more miserable masters). So they need to comfort themselves, and good citizens do it in their own way. But the vile and corrupt man, for whom all elevated ideas are foreign, revenges himself for his past and present abjection by contemplating the spectacle of humiliated greatness with the ineffable delight of the lowly. To raise himself in his own eyes, he looks down on the king of France, and he is assured of his own stature by comparing himself to this overturned colossus. Unconsciously, by a trick of his disordered imagination, he comes to regard this great collapse as his own work; he invests himself with all the power of the republic; he reproaches the king; he haughtily calls him a *so-called Louis XVIII*; and blasting the monarchy in furious pamphlets, like one of La Fontaine's heroes, he thinks himself a *thunderbolt of war* if he manages to frighten a few *Chouans*.<sup>20</sup>

<sup>20</sup> [Chouans were bands of rebellious peasants, royalists, and outlaws who troubled the peace of Brittany and other areas in the west of France during the period of the Directory.]

We must also take account of the fear that howls against the king, the fear that his return will mean one more rifle shot.

People of France, do not allow yourselves to be seduced by the sophisms of private interest, vanity, or cowardice. Do not listen to the reasoners; there has been too much reasoning in France, and *reasoning has banished reason*. Put aside your fears and reservations, and trust the infallible instinct of your conscience. Do you want to redeem yourselves in your own eyes? Do you want to acquire the right of self-esteem? Do you want to accomplish a sovereign act? . . . Recall your sovereign.

I am a perfect stranger to France, which I have never seen, and I expect nothing from her king, whom I shall never know. So if I commit some errors, Frenchmen can at least read them calmly as entirely disinterested errors.

But what are we, weak and blind human beings! And what is that flickering light we call *Reason*? When we have calculated all the probabilities, questioned history, satisfied every doubt and special interest, we may still embrace only a deceptive shadow rather than the truth. What decree has He pronounced on the king, on his dynasty, on his family, on France, and on Europe? Where and when will the troubles end, and by how many misfortunes must we purchase our tranquillity? Is it to build<sup>21</sup> that He has overthrown, or are our hardships to last forever? Alas! A dark cloud hides the future and no eye can penetrate its shadows. Nevertheless, everything announces that the present situation in France cannot last and that invincible nature must restore the monarchy. So whether our wishes are accomplished or whether inexorable Providence has decided otherwise, it is curious and even useful to study how these great changes occur and what role the multitude might play in an event whose date appears doubtful, never losing sight of history and the nature of man.

<sup>21</sup> [Maistre's manuscript has *construire* and he entered this correction (in place of *détruire* in the first and all subsequent editions) in his own copy of the 1797 edition. See Darcel ed., p. 152, n. 1.]

## CHAPTER NINE

### How Will the Counter-Revolution Happen if it Comes?

In theorizing about the counter-revolution, men have too often assumed that this counter-revolution should and could be solely the result of popular deliberation.<sup>1</sup> 'The people fear,' they say, 'the people want, the people will never consent, it does not suit the people, etc.' What a pity! The people count for nothing in revolutions, or at most count only as a passive instrument. Four or five persons, perhaps, will give France a king. Letters from Paris will announce to the provinces that France has a King, and the provinces will cry 'Long live the king.' Even in Paris, all but a twentieth of the inhabitants, perhaps, will learn some morning that they have a king. 'Is it possible?' they will exclaim. 'Isn't this a strange turn of events? Does anyone know by what gate he will be entering? Perhaps it would be wise to rent windows in advance, for there will be crushing crowds.' If the monarchy is restored, the people will no more decree its restoration than they decreed its destruction or the establishment of the revolutionary government.

I beg that my reflections be considered carefully, and I recommend them particularly to those who believe counter-revolution<sup>2</sup> to be impossible because there are too many Frenchmen attached to the Republic and because a change would cause suffering for too many.

<sup>1</sup> [Joseph de Maistre was quite proud of this chapter. After the Restoration he asked a friend to reread his *Considérations sur la France*, where, by signal good fortune, everything was prophetic, down to the names of two of the cities that were the first to recognize the king, Lyon and Bordeaux'. Letter to Count J. Potocki, 28 October 1814, *Oeuvres*, XII, 461.]

<sup>2</sup> [The manuscript, the first edition, and all subsequent editions read *révolution*. Maistre corrected this obvious lapse in his copy of the 1797 edition. See Darcel, p. 154, n.a.]



*Scilicet is superis labor est!*<sup>3</sup> Whether or not the Republic has the support of the majority is certainly open to dispute, but whether it does or not makes no difference at all. Enthusiasm and fanaticism are not lasting phenomena. Human nature soon tires of this kind of ecstasy. So even supposing that a people, and the French people in particular, may want something for a long time, it is still certain that they will not want it passionately for a long time. On the contrary, the peak of the fever having subsided, great outbursts of enthusiasm are always followed by despondency, apathy, and indifference. This is precisely the situation in France at the moment, where nothing is desired passionately except repose. Even if we supposed that the majority in France supported the Republic (which is indubitably false), what of it? When the king appears, it is certain that heads will not be counted and that no one will stir: first, because even those who prefer the Republic to the monarchy prefer their repose to the Republic, and second, because those opposed to the crown will be unable to unite.

In politics as in mechanics, theories fail if they do not take into consideration the different qualities of the materials that make up the *machines*. At first glance, for example, it appears true that *the prior consent of the French is necessary for the restoration of the monarchy*. Yet nothing is more false. Let us leave theory and take a look at the facts.

A courier arrives in Bordeaux, Nantes, Lyon, etc., carrying the news that *the king's authority has been acknowledged in Paris, that such-and-such faction* (which may or may not be named) *has seized power and declared that it is exercising authority in the king's name, that a courier has been dispatched to the sovereign, who is expected forthwith, and that the white cockade is being displayed everywhere*. Rumour takes the news and adds a thousand impressive details. What will people do? To give the Republic every chance, I grant it a majority and even a corps of republican troops. At first, perhaps, these troops will display a rebellious attitude; but they will want to eat, and they will soon begin to detach themselves from the regime that no longer pays them. Every officer, feeling quite clearly the lack of recognition accorded him by the republican regime no matter what he is told, also sees clearly that the first to cry 'Long live the king' will become a great hero. His self-esteem sketches the colourful and seductive image of a splen-

<sup>3</sup> Vergil, *Aeneid*, IV, 379. [Truly, this is work for gods.]

didly decorated general in the armies of *His Most Christian Majesty* haughtily reviewing those same men who not long since would have had him up before the municipal court. These ideas are so simple and so natural that they can escape no one. Every officer senses what is happening, and it follows that they suspect one another. Fear and distrust produce indecision and coolness. The soldier, no longer spurred on by his officer, becomes even more discouraged: the disciplinary bond receives an inexplicable blow, a magic blow that suddenly snaps it. One man looks towards the royal paymaster who is coming, another takes advantage of the opportunity to rejoin his family. They no longer command or obey; they no longer act together.

Among the citizens it is another story. They are coming and going, disputing and questioning one another. Everyone fears those whom he would need to trust; doubts consume hours when minutes are decisive. Everywhere prudence inhibits audacity; the old lack determination, and the young lack counsel. On one side there are terrible risks, on the other certain amnesty and probable favours. In addition, where are the means to resist? And where are the leaders who can be trusted? There is no danger in repose, and the least action may prove an unpardonable mistake. So one must wait. They wait, but the next day they receive news that such-and-such city has opened its gates. More reason not to act precipitously. It is soon learned that the news was false, but two other cities, believing it true, have given the example. Accepting the news as true, they have just submitted and decisively influenced the first, which had not thought of yielding. The governor of the place has presented the king with the keys of *his good city of—*. He is the first officer who has had the honour of receiving the king in a citadel of his realm. The king made him a marshal of France on the spot. *Innumerable fleur-de-lis* cover him with immortal honour, his name will be renowned forever in France. Every minute the royalist movement is being reinforced; soon it becomes irresistible. 'Long live the king,' cry the loving and the loyal, beside themselves with joy. 'Long live the king,' responds the republican hypocrite in dire terror. What does it matter? There is only one cry. And the king is crowned.

Citizens! This is how counter-revolutions are made. God warns us that He has reserved to Himself the establishment of sovereignties by never confiding to the masses the choice of their masters. In these great moments that decide the fate of empires, He employs them

only as a passive instrument. Never do they get what they want; they always accept, they never choose. One may even notice that it is an affectation of Providence, if I may be permitted the expression, that the efforts of a people to obtain a goal are precisely the means that Providence employs to keep them from it. Thus the Roman people gave themselves masters while believing they were opposing the aristocracy by following Caesar. This is the image of all popular insurrections. In the French Revolution the people have continually been enslaved, outraged, ruined, and mutilated by all parties, and the parties in their turn, working one against the other, have continually drifted, despite all their efforts, towards breakup at length on the rocks awaiting them.

If one wants to know the probable result of the French Revolution, it suffices to examine that which united all parties. They have all wanted the debasement, even the destruction, of the universal Church and the monarchy, *from which it follows* that all their efforts will culminate in the glorification of Christianity and the monarchy.

All men who have written on or reflected about history have admired this secret force that makes sport of human plans. One such man was that great captain of antiquity who honoured this force as an intelligent and free power and who undertook nothing without recommending himself to it.<sup>4</sup>

But it is especially in the establishment and overthrow of sovereignties that the action of Providence shows itself in the most striking way. Not only do the people as a whole participate in these great movements only like wood and rope used by a workman, but even their leaders are only such to untrained eyes: in fact, they are ruled just as much as they rule the people. These men who, taken together, seem to be the tyrants of the multitude are themselves tyrannized by two or three men, who are tyrannized by one. And if this single individual could and wanted to reveal his secret, you would see that he does not know himself how he gained power, that his influence is a greater mystery to himself than to others, and that circumstances which he could neither foresee nor affect have done everything for him and without him.

<sup>4</sup> 'For he believed that nothing in human affairs happened without the design of the gods; and for that reason he had established in his house a shrine of fortune, which he venerated most religiously.' Cornelius Nepos, *Life of Timoleon*, ch. iv.

Who could have told the proud Henry VI that a servant girl would snatch from him the sceptre of France?<sup>5</sup> The noisome explanations that have been given of this great event have not stripped it of its marvels; and although it has been dishonoured twice, first by the absence, and then by the prostitution, of talent,<sup>6</sup> it nevertheless remains the sole subject in French history worthy of an epic muse.

Do you believe that *these arms will be shortened*, which once used so feeble an instrument, that the Supreme Commander of Empires will take the advice of the French to give them a king? No, He will again choose, as He has always done, the *weakest to confound the strongest*. He has no need of foreign armies, He has no need of the *coalition*, and just as He has preserved the integrity of France despite the counsels and power of so many princes, *who are before His eyes as if they were not*, when the time comes, He will restore the French monarchy despite its enemies. He will chase out these noisy insects *pulveris exigui jactu*;<sup>7</sup> the king will come, he will see, he will conquer.

Then you will be astonished by the profound nullity of these men who appeared so powerful. Today it belongs to the wise to predict this judgement and to be sure, before experience proves it, that the rulers of France possess only an artificial and transitory power, of which the very excess proves the nothingness, 'that their stock was neither planted, nor sown, nor rooted in the earth, and that a whirlwind shall take them away like straw'.<sup>8</sup>

So it is fruitless for so many writers to insist on the difficulties in the way of the restoration of the monarchy; it is fruitless for them to frighten the French with the consequences of a counter-revolution. And when they conclude that the French, dreading these difficulties, will never allow the restoration of the monarchy, they argue very badly, for the French will not be deliberating. Perhaps they will receive a king from the hand of a maid.

No nation can give itself a government; at most, when such-and-such a right exists in its constitution,<sup>9</sup> and this right is unrecognized or suppressed, certain men, aided by circumstances, may be able to

<sup>5</sup> [Henry VI of England (1422–61) had been proclaimed king of France at the death of Charles VI, but Joan of Arc's intervention led to the coronation and recognition of Charles VII as king.]

<sup>6</sup> [Chapelain's *La Pucelle* (1656) and Voltaire's *La Pucelle* (1755).]

<sup>7</sup> Vergil, *Georgics*, iv, 87. [Tossing a little dust.]

<sup>8</sup> Isaiah, 40:24.

<sup>9</sup> I mean its *natural* constitution, for its *written* constitution is only paper.

push aside the obstacles and gain acknowledgement of the people's rights. Human power extends no further.

For the rest, although Providence is not the least embarrassed by what it might cost the French to have a king, it is nevertheless very important to observe that writers who frighten the French with the misfortunes that the restoration of the monarchy might entail are certainly in error or bad faith.

## CHAPTER TEN

# On the Supposed Dangers of a Counter-Revolution

### General Considerations

It is common fallacy nowadays to insist on the danger of counter-revolution in order to show that we should not return to the monarchy. A great number of works designed to persuade the French to hold fast to the Republic are only developments of this idea. The authors of these works stress the evils inseparable from revolutions; then, observing that the monarchy cannot be restored in France without a new revolution, they conclude from this that the Republic must be maintained. This stupendous fallacy, whether it arises from fear or from the desire to deceive, deserves to be carefully discussed.

Almost all errors spring from the misuse of words. It has become customary to give the name *counter-revolution* to any movement aimed at stopping the Revolution. Because such a movement must work against the Revolution, some would conclude that it would be simply a reverse revolution. But would it be argued, for example, that the return from sickness to health must be as painful as the passage from health to sickness? Or that because the monarchy was overthrown by monstrous men that it must be restored by the same type? Ah, if those who peddle this fallacy would only be honest with themselves! They know full well that the friends of religion and monarchy are incapable of the excesses with which their enemies have besmirched themselves. They know full well, even taking things at their worst, taking full account of human weaknesses, that the oppressed party is a thousand times more virtuous than their oppressors. They know full well that the first group knows not how to defend or revenge itself and is often enough openly mocked on this account.



In order to bring about the French Revolution, it was necessary to overthrow religion, outrage morality, violate every propriety, and commit every crime. This diabolical work required the employment of such a number of vicious men that perhaps never before had so many vices acted together to accomplish any evil whatsoever. In contrast, to restore order, the king will call on all the virtues; no doubt he will wish to do this, but by the very nature of things he will be forced to do so. His most pressing interest will be to unite justice and mercy; honourable men will come of themselves to take up positions in posts where they can be of use, and religion, lending its authority to politics, will give the strength that can be drawn only from this august sister.

I have no doubt that many men will ask to be shown the bases of these magnificent hopes; but can we believe that the political world operates by chance, that it is not organized, directed, and animated by the same wisdom that is revealed in the physical world? The guilty hands that overthrow a state necessarily inflict grievous wounds, for no free agent can thwart the plans of the Creator without incurring in the sphere of his activity evils proportionate to the extent of the crime. This law pertains more to the goodness of the Supreme Being than to his justice.

But when man works to restore order, he associates himself with the author of order; he is favoured by *nature*, that is to say, by the ensemble of secondary forces that are the agents of the Divinity. His action partakes of the divine; it becomes both gentle and imperious, forcing nothing yet not resisted by anything. His arrangements restore health. As he acts, he calms disquiet and the painful agitation that is the effect and symptom of disorder. In the same way, the hands of a skilful surgeon bring the cessation of pain that proves the dislocated joint has been put right.

Frenchmen, it was to the noise of hellish songs, the blasphemy of atheism, the cries of death, and the prolonged moans of slaughtered innocence, it was by the light of flames, on the debris of throne and altar, watered by the blood of the best of kings and an innumerable host of other victims, it was by the contempt of morality and the established faith, it was in the midst of very crime that your seducers and your tyrants founded what they call *your liberty*.

It will be in the name of the VERY GOOD AND VERY GREAT GOD, in the train of men whom He loves and inspires, and under the influence

of His creative power that you will return to your old constitution and that a king will give you the only thing that you ought wisely to desire – *liberty through the monarchy*.

What deplorable blindness makes you persist in fighting painfully against the power that renders vain all your efforts in order to warn you of its presence? You are powerless only because you have dared to separate yourself from it and even to oppose it. The moment you act in concert with it you will participate in some way in its nature; every obstacle will be levelled before you, and you will laugh at the childish fears that are disturbing you at present. All parts of the political machine have a natural tendency toward the place assigned to them, and this tendency will favour all the king's efforts; and order being the natural element of man, you will find there the happiness that you have vainly sought in disorder. The Revolution made you suffer because it was the work of every vice, and the vices are very justly man's executioners. For the opposite reason, the return of the monarchy, far from producing the evils that you fear for the future, will arrest those that devour you today. All your efforts will be positive; you will destroy only destruction.

Rid yourself for once of these distressing doctrines that have dishonoured our century and ruined France. You have already learned to know the preachers of these fatal dogmas for what they are, but the impression they have made on you has not been effaced. In all your plans for creation and restoration, you forget only God. They have separated you from Him; it is only by an effort of reasoning that you raise your thoughts to the inexhaustible source of all existence. You want to see only man – his actions so weak, so dependent, so circumscribed, his will so corrupt, so irresolute – and the existence of a superior cause is only a theory for you. Nevertheless, it presses in on you and surrounds you; you feel it, and the entire universe announces it to you. When you are told that without it you have power only to destroy, this is no vain theory you are sold, this is a practical truth founded on the experience of every age and on the knowledge of human nature. Look at history and you will not see any institution of any strength or duration that does not rest on a divine idea. It does not matter what kind of idea, for there is no entirely false religious system. So talk no more of difficulties and the evils that alarm you as the consequence of what you call *counter-revolution*. All the evils that you have suffered come from yourselves. Why should

you not have been wounded by the ruins of the edifice that you have brought down upon yourselves? Reconstruction is another order of things; you have only to reenter the way that can take you there. You will never create anything following the path of nothingness.

Oh, these deceitful or cowardly writers who are guilty of terrifying people with this vain bugbear they call *counter-revolution*! These writers who agree that the Revolution was a frightful scourge, but who still maintain that it is impossible to turn back. Do they say that the evils of the Revolution are over and the French have completed their journey? The people were so crushed and intimidated by Robespierre's reign that any state of affairs where there is no longer uninterrupted killing seems happy and bearable. During the height of the Terror, foreigners noticed that all the letters from France that recounted the ghastly scenes of this cruel period ended with the remark 'At the moment, things are quiet.' Which is to say, 'The executioners are resting, they are regaining their strength, everything goes well while we wait.' The feeling has survived the infernal regime that created it. Petrified by the terror and discouraged by the policy errors of foreign powers, the Frenchman has shut himself up in an egoism that prevents him from seeing any more than himself and his present time and place. Assassinations are occurring in a hundred places in France; it does not matter, he is not being pillaged or massacred. If crime is committed on his street or in his neighbour's house, again what does it matter? It has already happened, *now it is quiet*. He will double his locks and not think about it. In a word, every Frenchman is happy enough as long as he is not being killed.

Nevertheless the laws are unenforced and the government recognizes its impotence to execute them. The most infamous crimes are increasingly common in all parts of the country; the revolutionary demon is proudly raising its head again. The constitution is no more than a spider's web, and the regime permits itself horrible outrages. Marriage has become legal prostitution; there is no more paternal authority, no more fear of crime, no more shelter for the indigent. Hideous suicides proclaim to the government the despair of the unfortunates who accuse it. People are being demoralized in the most frightening way; the absence of religion joined to the total absence of public education is preparing for France a generation the very idea of which makes one shudder.

Cowardly optimists! This is the order of things that you are afraid to see changed! Shake off your miserable lethargy! Instead of showing people imaginary woes that might result from a change, use your talents to make them desire the gentle and health-giving agitation that will bring the king back to his throne and restore order in France.

Show us, too-busy men, show us these terrible misfortunes that so menace you as to disgust you with the monarchy. Do you not see that your republican institutions have no roots, that they are simply *sitting* on your soil in contrast to their predecessors, which were *planted* there? It took an axe to fell the latter; a breath will sweep away the other and leave not a trace. Surely it is not at all the same thing to take away the hereditary rank of a president of a parlement, which rank was his property, as it is to dismiss a temporary judge without rank. The Revolution caused so much suffering because it destroyed so much, because it suddenly and harshly violated every kind of propriety, prejudice, and custom. Because every plebeian tyranny is by its very nature impetuous, insulting, and ruthless, that which accomplished the French Revolution had to push these characteristics to excess. The world has never seen a baser or more absolute tyranny.

Men are most sensitive to opinion; wounded here, they raise the greatest fuss. This is what made the Revolution so painful, because it trampled under foot all nobility of opinion. Now even if the restoration of the monarchy caused the same real privations for the same number of men, there would still be an immense difference in that it would not destroy any dignity, for there is no dignity in France at the moment for the same reason that there is no sovereignty.

But even if we consider only the physical privations, the difference would be no less striking. The usurper slew the innocent; the king will pardon the guilty. The one confiscated legitimate property; the other will be hesitant to disturb illegitimate property. The one took for its motto *Diruit, aedificat, mutat quadrata rotundis*.<sup>1</sup> After seven years of trying, it still cannot organize a primary school or a country festival; even its partisans mock its laws, its officials, its institutions, its celebrations, and even its costumes. The other, building on a true foundation, will not be groping; an unseen force will preside at its

<sup>1</sup> Horace, *Ep.* 1, 100. [Pulling down, building up, and changing square to round.]

acts; it will disturb only to restore. Moreover, all orderly action torments only evil.

Again, it is a great error to imagine that the people have something to lose in the restoration of the monarchy, for the only thing the people won from the general upheaval was an idea: *they have equal right to all positions*, it is said. What is involved? It is a question of knowing what these positions are worth. These positions, which were so ostentatiously offered the people as a great conquest, are in fact worth nothing before the tribunal of public opinion. Even the military profession, more honoured in France than any other, has lost its lustre; it is no longer highly regarded, and peace will lower its prestige even more. They threaten the military with the restoration of the monarchy, and yet none have more to gain. There is nothing so evident as the necessity that will require the king to maintain them at their posts. And dependence on them will sooner or later change this political necessity into a necessity of affection, respect, and recognition. Through an extraordinary combination of circumstances, there is nothing about the military that could shock the most royalist opinion. None have a right to sneer at them, since they fought only for France. So there is no prejudicial barrier between them and the king capable of hampering mutual respect. He is a Frenchman above all. They should recall James II during the battle of the Hogue<sup>2</sup> applauding from the shore the valour of the Englishmen who had managed to dethrone him. Can they doubt that the king is proud of their valour and that he regards them in his heart as the defenders of the integrity of his kingdom? Has he not publicly applauded this valour while regretting (it must be noted) *that it was not displayed for a better cause?* Has he not congratulated the brave men of Condé's army *for having defeated the hatreds that the deepest artifice has laboured so long to nourish?*<sup>3</sup> The French military, after their victories, have only one need: this is that legitimate sovereignty comes to legitimize their status, for now they are feared and despised. The most complete unconcern is the reward of their labours, and their fellow citizens are of all people the most indifferent to the army's triumph. They often go so far as to detest these victories that nourish the warlike temper of their masters. The restoration of the monarchy will imme-

<sup>2</sup> [The English and Dutch fleets defeated the French fleet off La Hogue in 1692.]

<sup>3</sup> Letter from the king to the prince de Condé of 3 January 1797, printed in all the newspapers.

diately restore the military to a high place in public opinion; talents will be on the way to winning a real dignity, an ever-increasing lustre that will always be the warrior's due and that they will pass on to their children. This pure glory, this quiet splendour, will be worth more than the honourable mentions and the ostracism of forgetfulness that has succeeded the scaffold.

If the question is looked at from the most general point of view, it will be found that monarchy is, without contradiction, the form of government that gives the most distinction to the greatest number of persons. Sovereignty in this kind of government possesses enough brilliance to be able to share a part of it, with the necessary gradations, with a crowd of its more or less distinguished agents. In a republic, sovereignty is not tangible, as it is in a monarchy; it is a purely moral concept, and its greatness is incommunicable. In addition, in republics public offices are nothing outside the capital city, and moreover, they are nothing except insofar as they are occupied by members of government. Then it is the man who honours the office, not the office that honours the man, so that the man is honoured not as an agent but as a *portion* of sovereignty.

One can see that in countries obeying republican governments public office (if those reserved to the members of the sovereign are excluded) raises men very little in the eyes of their fellow citizens and has practically no significance in public opinion. This is because a republic is, by its nature, the government that gives the most rights to the very small number of men who are called the *sovereign* and that takes away the most from all the others, who are called *subjects*.

The nearer a republic approaches a pure democracy, the more striking this observation becomes. Just recall the innumerable offices (even omitting all the useless ones) that the old government of France offered to universal ambition. The secular clergy, the regular clergy, the sword, the robe, finance, administration, etc. were all doors open to every kind of talent and ambition! What incalculable gradations of personal distinction! In this infinite number of places none was beyond the legitimate aspirations of the ordinary citizen;<sup>4</sup> there were even a great number that were valuable properties, that really made

<sup>4</sup> The famous law that excluded the Third Estate from military service could not be enforced; it was simply a ministerial blunder that passion spoke of as a fundamental law.



the possessor a *notable*, and that belonged exclusively to the Third Estate.

The highest positions were more difficult for the ordinary citizen to obtain, but this is quite reasonable. There is too much movement in a state and not enough subordination when *everyone* can aspire to *everything*. Order requires that, in general, offices be graded like the condition of citizens, and that the barriers that separate the different classes be let down only to talents, and sometimes simply to patronage. In this way, there is emulation without humiliation and movement without destruction; the distinction attached to an office is the product, as the word implies, of the greater or lesser difficulty of obtaining it.

To object that these distinctions are bad is to change the question. But I would say, if your offices do not elevate those possessing them, do not boast of giving them to everyone, for you are not giving them anything. If, on the contrary, offices do and must mean distinctions, I repeat that no honest man can deny that monarchy is the government that through offices alone, and independently of the nobility, *distinguishes* the greatest number of men from their fellow citizens.

Moreover, one must not be the dupe of that ideal equality that is only a matter of words. The soldier who has the privilege of talking to his officer in a grossly familiar tone is not by that his equal. An aristocracy of office that could not at first be perceived in the general confusion is beginning to emerge; even the nobility is regaining its indestructible influence. The army and the navy are already commanded, in part, by gentlemen or by the students that the old regime had ennobled by admitting to a noble profession. Indeed, these men won the republic its greatest successes. If the perhaps unfortunate delicacy of the French nobility had not led them to leave France, they would be in command everywhere. It is common enough to hear it said *that if the nobility had been willing they would have been given all the offices*. Certainly, at the moment I write (4 January 1797), the Republic would very much like to have its vessels manned by the nobles whom it massacred at Quiberon.<sup>5</sup>

<sup>5</sup> [With the failure of the disastrous Quiberon expedition of 1795, some 6,000 men, including about 1,000 *émigrés*, were taken prisoner by General Hoche. The *émigrés* were shot. The representative reporting the list of those executed to the Committee of Public Safety wrote, 'The entire prerevolutionary navy landed at Quiberon.' Another contemporary commented, 'Hoche won . . . but he killed the French navy.' See E.

So the people, or the mass of citizens, have nothing to lose; on the contrary, they have everything to gain with the restoration of the monarchy, which will bring back a multitude of real, lucrative, and even hereditary distinctions in place of the insecure and undignified jobs that the Republic provides. I do not have to insist on the financial compensation attached to offices, since it is notorious that the Republic pays poorly or not at all. It has produced only scandalous fortunes; only vice is enriched in its service.

I will conclude this section with some observations that (it seems to me) prove clearly that the danger that counter-revolution is said to involve is to be found precisely in delaying this great change.

The Bourbon family cannot be touched by the republican leaders; it exists, its rights are apparent, and its silence speaks louder perhaps than any manifesto.

It is perfectly obvious that the French Republic, even though it seems to have softened its maxims, can have no real allies. By its nature, it is the enemy of every government; it tends to destroy them all, so that all have an interest in destroying it. Politics may no doubt give allies to the Republic, but these alliances are unnatural, or if you prefer, *France* has allies but the *French Republic* has none.<sup>6</sup>

Friends and enemies will always agree to give France a king. The success of the English Revolution of the last century is often cited – but what a difference! The monarchy was not overthrown in England. The monarch alone disappeared to make room for another. The very blood of the Stuarts was on the throne, and it was this that gave the new king his claim. This king had the advantage of being a strong prince with all the strength of his House and his family relationships. Moreover, the English government posed no dangers to other governments; it was a monarchy, as before the Revolution. Nevertheless, it would not have taken much for James II to regain his sceptre, and if he had had a bit more luck or only a little more tact, it would not have escaped him. Even though England had a king, even though

Gabory, 'Le Supplice des émigrés pris à Quiberon', *Revue des Deux Mondes*, 15 July 1930.]

<sup>6</sup>

We know it: this licence we poets claim  
and in our turn we grant the like;  
but not so far that savages should mate with tame  
or Serpents couple with birds, lambs with tigers.

[Horace, *Ars Poetica*, 11–13]

This is what certain cabinets should say to the Europe that questions them.

religious prejudices united with political prejudices to exclude the Pretender, even though the geographical situation of the kingdom protected it from invasion, nevertheless, up until the middle of this century England faced the danger of a second revolution. It all depended, as we know, on the battle of Culloden.<sup>7</sup>

In France, on the other hand, the government is not monarchical; indeed, it is the enemy of all the neighbouring monarchies. It is not a prince who commands, and if the state is ever attacked, it does not appear likely that the foreign relatives of the pentarchs would raise troops to defend them. So France will be in constant danger of civil war. This danger has two obvious causes: the just rights of the Bourbons are always to be feared, and the astute policy of other powers will always be ready to try to profit from circumstances. As soon as the French throne is occupied by the legitimate sovereign no prince in the world could dream of seizing it, but as long as it is vacant it will be the object of covetousness and intrigue by every kind of royal ambition. Moreover, since it has been pushed to the dust, power is within the reach of anyone. Orderly government excludes an infinity of schemes, but under the rule of a false sovereignty there is no end of chimerical plots. All passions are unchained and every hope is licensed. The cowards who reject the king for fear of civil war are actually preparing the way for it. It is just because they foolishly desire *stability and the constitution* that they will have neither stability nor the constitution. There is no perfect security for France in the present situation. Only the king, the legitimate king, wielding the sceptre of Charlemagne from the majesty of his throne, can dampen or disarm all these hatreds and outwit all these sinister plots. Only he by his command can make order of all these ambitions, calm excited minds, and suddenly surround authority with that magic wall which is its true guardian.

There is another consideration that must be kept before the eyes of those Frenchmen who are actually sharing authority and whose position enables them to influence the restoration of the monarchy. The more honourable of these men must not forget they will be carried along, sooner or later, by the force of things, that time flies, and that the chance for glory escapes them. That which they enjoy

<sup>7</sup> [Charles Edward, the Stuart pretender, was defeated at the battle of Culloden in Scotland in 1746.]

at the moment is a comparative glory: they put an end to the massacres; they tried to dry the nation's tears. They look good because they have succeeded the greatest scoundrels who ever soiled this globe. But when the throne has been restored for a hundred combined reasons, *amnesty*, in the full sense of the word, will be theirs. Their names, always obscure, will remain shrouded in oblivion. They should never lose sight of the immortal radiance that must surround the names of the monarchy's restorers. Every insurrection of the people against the nobility ends up in the creation of new nobles, and we have already seen how these new races, whose fame is created by circumstances and who from their creation will claim everything, are formed.

### On the Property of the Nation

The question of the restitution of the property of the nation is being used to frighten the French; the king is blamed for not mentioning this delicate topic in his declaration.<sup>8</sup> One could say to a large majority of the nation, 'What does it matter to you?' and perhaps this would not be such a bad approach. But rather than give the impression of avoiding difficulties, I would point out that in this question of confiscated property the restoration of the monarchy agrees with the visible interests of France as a whole and even with the well-understood interests of the purchasers of the property in particular. The brigandage exercised with respect to these properties is evident to the most insensitive conscience. No one believes in the legitimacy of these acquisitions, and even those who have declaimed the most eloquently in favour of the present legislation have hastened to resell to ensure their profits. People do not dare enjoy these properties publicly, and the cooler people become to the idea, the less they will dare utilize these properties. The buildings will decay, and no one will dare build new ones for a long time; growth will be feeble, and French capital will dwindle considerably. Already this matter has caused a lot of trouble, and those who complain about the abuses of *decrees* must

<sup>8</sup> [*Biens nationaux*: this 'property of the nation' included confiscated church lands, crown lands, the king's personal domain, and confiscated estates of the *émigrés*. Much of this property had been sold to individuals who feared that restoration of the monarchy would mean its loss.]

understand that this is a decree affecting perhaps a third of the most powerful kingdom in Europe.<sup>9</sup>

The deplorable condition of these properties has been described often enough in the legislative assembly. The problem will continue to worsen as long as the public conscience is troubled by doubts as to the soundness of these acquisitions. But who can see the end?

Considering the possessors only, the leading danger for them comes from the government. Do not be deceived; which one is neither here nor there. The most unjust imaginable will ask no more than to fill its coffers in such a way as to make the least possible enemies. Moreover, everyone knows the conditions under which the buyers acquired these properties; everyone knows what infamous manoeuvring, what scandalous discounting, was involved. The initial and continuing defects of title are quite indelible. So the French government cannot help knowing that in putting pressure on these purchasers it will have public opinion on its side and that it will appear unjust only to the purchasers. Besides, under a popular government, even a legitimate one, injustice has no shame. One may judge what will happen in France, where the government, shifting with personalities and lacking identity, does not think of itself as going back on its word when it overthrows what has been done previously.

So it will turn to this confiscated property as soon as it is able to do so. Full of righteousness and (this must not be forgotten) of the jealousy of the have-nots for the haves, it will torment the possessors, either by new sales modified in some way or by general demands for price supplements or by extraordinary taxes. In other words, the possessors will never be left in peace.

But under a stable government everything is stable, so that even for the purchasers of this property it is important that the monarchy be restored in order that they know what they have. It is not at all fair to reproach the king for not having spoken clearly on this point in his declaration; he could not have done so without extreme imprudence. Perhaps when the time comes legislation will not be the best way to settle the problem.<sup>10</sup>

But what I said in the preceding chapter must be recalled here: the conveniences of such-and-such class of individuals will not stop

<sup>9</sup> [Maistre's estimate of a third is no doubt too high.]

<sup>10</sup> [In 1814-15, Louis XVIII had to ratify these acquisitions.]

the counter-revolution. All I claim to prove is that it is to the advantage of the small number of men who can influence this great event not to wait until the accumulated abuses of anarchy make it inevitable, for the more necessary the king becomes, the harder will be the lot of all those who gained from the Revolution.

### Of Vengeance

Another bugbear that has been used to make the French fear the return of their king is the vengeance with which his return must be accompanied. This objection, like the others, is usually made by intelligent men who do not believe it themselves; however, it is well to discuss it for the benefit of moderate Frenchmen who believe it well founded.

A number of royalist writers have rejected as an insult this supposed desire of vengeance on their part. Let one of them speak for all, and I cite him for my own pleasure as well as that of my readers. No one can accuse me of choosing a rigid royalist.

‘Under the rule of an illegitimate power the most horrible vengeances are to be feared, for who would have the right to repress them? The victim can only call to his help the authority of laws that do not exist and a government that is only the creation of crime and usurpation.

‘It is quite otherwise with a government placed firmly on sacred, ancient, and legitimate bases; it has the right to stifle the most just vengeance and to punish instantly with the sword of justice anyone who surrenders himself more to the sentiments of nature than to those of duty.

‘Only a legitimate government has the right to proclaim an amnesty and the means to enforce it.

‘It is demonstrable then that the most complete and purest royalist, the one whose relatives and properties have been the most grievously outraged, must be punished by death, if, under a legitimate government he dares revenge his own injuries when the king has demanded that he pardon them.

‘Therefore it is under a government founded on our principles that amnesty can be securely accorded and severely observed.

‘Ah, no doubt it would be easy to dispute the extent to which the king could extend his amnesty. The exceptions prescribed by his first



duty are quite evident. All those guilty of Louis XVI's blood can only hope for God's pardon, but then who would dare trace exactly the limits of the king's amnesty and clemency? My heart and my pen both refuse to try. If anyone ever dares to write on this subject, it will no doubt be that rare and perhaps unique man, if he exists, who himself never erred in the course of this horrible revolution and whose heart, as pure as his conduct, has never needed pardon.<sup>11</sup>

Reason and sentiment could not be expressed with more nobility. One would have to pity the man who could not recognize the accent of conviction in this piece.<sup>12</sup>

Ten months after the date of this work, the king in his declaration pronounced this sentence so renowned and so worthy of being known: 'Who would dare seek revenge when the king grants pardon?'

He excepted from amnesty only those who voted the death of Louis XVI, the cooperators, the direct and immediate instruments of his punishment, and the members of the revolutionary tribunal who sent the queen and Madame Elizabeth to the scaffold. Searching even to restrict the anathema in regard to the first, as much as conscience and honour would permit him, he did not count as parricides those of whom it might be thought 'that they associated with Louis XVI's assassins with the intention only of trying to save him'.

Even with regard 'to these monsters whom posterity will mention only with horror' the king contented himself with saying, with as much restraint as justice, 'All France calls the sword of justice down upon their heads.'

But by this phrase he did not deprive himself of his right to grant pardon in particular cases; it is up to the guilty to see what they can put in the balance to counterbalance their crime. Monk used Ingolsby to stop Lambert. It would be possible to do better than Ingolsby.<sup>13</sup>

Moreover, without detracting from the just horror due the murderers of Louis XVI, I would observe that in the eyes of divine justice all are not equally guilty. In morals as in physics, the force of fer-

<sup>11</sup> *Observations sur la conduite des puissances coalisées*, by the count d'Antraigues, avant-propos, pp. xxxiv ff.

<sup>12</sup> [In fact, the count d'Antraigues was not an entirely disinterested royalist. At the time Maistre wrote, d'Antraigues was operating a free-lance espionage network for profit, selling information to Spain, England, Austria, and other customers.]

<sup>13</sup> [Ingolsby had been one of Charles I's judges. Nevertheless Monk used him against Lambert when the latter, a popular general under Cromwell, escaped from the Tower of London.]

mentation is proportionate to the fermenting mass. Charles I's seventy judges were much more the masters of themselves than Louis XVI's judges. Certainly there were among the latter the consciously guilty who cannot be detested enough, but these great culprits had the skill to excite such a terror, they made such an impression on less vigorous minds, that many deputies were no doubt deprived of a part of their free will. It is difficult to form a clear idea of the indefinable and supernatural delirium that took possession of the assembly at the time of Louis XVI's trial. I am convinced that many of the guilty, in remembering that dark time, think of it as a bad dream, that they are tempted to doubt what they did, and that they can no more explain it to themselves than we can explain it to them. These men, angry and surprised to be among the guilty, must try to make their peace.

In addition, this consideration applies to only a few; the nation would be quite mean if it regarded the punishment of such men as an obstacle to counter-revolution. But for those who worry about it, one may point out that Providence has already begun the punishment of the guilty; more than sixty regicides, the most guilty among them, have already died a violent death. No doubt others also will perish or flee Europe before France has a king; very few will fall into the hands of justice.

The French, quite calm about judicial revenge, must also be so about private vengeance; they have been given the most solemn promises in this regard. They have the king's word; they are not permitted to fear.

But since it is necessary to appeal to all men and to foresee all possible objections, since one must reply even to those who do not believe in honour and faith, it must be proved that private vengeance will not be possible.<sup>14</sup>

The most powerful sovereign has only two arms; his power depends on the instruments he uses and what he is given by public opinion. Moreover, even though it is evident that after the assumed restoration the king will want only to pardon, let us, to take things at their worst, make the entirely opposite supposition. How would he

<sup>14</sup> [There had, in fact, been a relatively large number of acts of private vengeance during the so-called White Terror in 1795. The second Restoration in 1815 (after Napoleon's Hundred Days) also saw a White Terror characterized by acts of personal vengeance.]

go about it if he wanted to exercise arbitrary vengeance? Would the French army as we know it be a very pliant instrument in his hands? Ignorance and bad faith have been pleased to represent the future king as a Louis XIV, who like Homer's Jupiter, has only to lift an eyebrow to make France tremble. One hardly dare prove how false this supposition is. The power of sovereignty lies entirely in its moral force. It commands in vain if it does not possess this, and power must be possessed in its plenitude to be abused. The king of France who will ascend the throne of his ancestors surely will not wish to begin with abuses, and if he so wished it would be in vain because he would not be strong enough to fulfil the wish. The red bonnet, in touching the royal brow, has caused the sacred oil to disappear: the charm is broken, prolonged profanations have destroyed the divine rule of national prejudices, and for a long time to come, while cold reason may bind bodies, minds will remain standing. They claim to fear that the new king of France will deal severely with his enemies. The poor man, if he could only recompense his friends!<sup>15</sup>

So the French have two infallible guarantees against the supposed vengeance which they fear – the king's interest and his impotence.<sup>16</sup>

The return of the *émigrés* furnishes the adversaries of the monarchy with another unfailing subject of imaginary fears, so it is important to dissipate this vision.

The first thing to remember is that there are true propositions whose truth depends on the circumstances; however, they are repeated long after time has rendered them false and even ridiculous. The revolutionary party could have feared the return of the *émigrés* shortly after the passing of the laws that proscribed them. I do not

<sup>15</sup> Everyone knows Charles II's jest on the pleonasm of the English formula, amnesty and forgetfulness: 'I understand,' he said, 'amnesty for my enemies and oblivion for my friends.'

<sup>16</sup> Events have justified all these sensible predictions. Since this work was completed, the French government has exposed two conspiracies and published documents by which the two factions, the one Jacobin, the other royalist, must be judged. In the Jacobin sheet it was written *Death to all our enemies*, and in the royalist *Pardon to all those who will not refuse it*. To keep people from drawing the consequences, they have said that the parlement must annul the royal amnesty. But this stupidity exceeds the *maximum*; surely it will not be believed. [Maistre's reference to a 'Jacobin' conspiracy probably refers to Babeuf's Conspiracy of the Equals. The second involved an attempt by a royalist organization to foment insurrection among troops stationed in Paris. The Directory learned of the plot, set a trap, and arrested four royalist agents who were tried in March of 1797.]

concede that they were right, but what does it matter? It is a purely idle question now, useless to discuss. The question is to know if, *at the present moment*, the return of the *émigrés* is something dangerous for France.

The nobility sent two hundred eighty-four deputies to the Estates-General of fatal memory that produced all we have seen. According to a work on several bailiwicks there were never more than eighty electors for a deputy. It is not impossible that certain bailiwicks had a greater number present, but one must also take into account the individuals who voted in more than one bailiwick. All things considered, one can estimate at twenty-five thousand the number of heads of noble families who were represented in the Estates-General, and multiplying by five, the number we know is commonly attributed to each family, we have about one hundred twenty-five thousand noble heads. Let us say one hundred thirty thousand, to take the highest possible number. Take away the women, leaving sixty-five thousand. Subtract from this number (1) the nobles who never left; (2) those who have already returned; (3) the dotards; (4) the children; (5) the sick; (6) the priests; and (7) all those who have perished as a result of war, punishment, or purely natural causes. What will be left is a number that is hard to determine exactly, but that from any point of view whatever could not alarm France.

A prince worthy of his name led five thousand, or at most six thousand, men into combat. This corps, which was not even composed entirely of nobles, gave proof of admirable valour under foreign colours, but if it was isolated it would disappear.<sup>17</sup> So it is clear that, militarily, the *émigrés* are nothing and can do nothing.

There is one additional consideration that is more particularly related to the spirit of this work and that merits development.

Nothing happens by chance in this world, and even in a secondary sense there is no disorder, for disorder is commanded by a sovereign hand that submits it to a rule and forces it to contribute to a good.

A revolution is only a political movement that has to produce a certain effect in a certain time. Such a movement has its laws, and observing it carefully over a certain period of time one can draw certain enough conclusions for the future. Now one of the laws of

<sup>17</sup> [The prince de Condé had a considerable army in the Rhineland in 1792, but by 1796 this group had withered away to a relatively small band. Maistre, in effect, is recommending that they disband.]

the French Revolution is that the *émigrés* can attack it only at their own misfortune and that they are totally excluded from whatever work they undertake.

From the first dream of counter-revolution to the ever-lamentable Quiberon expedition, nothing they have tried has succeeded and their efforts have even turned against them. Not only do they not succeed, but everything they try is marked by such powerlessness and nullity that public opinion has become accustomed to regarding them as men who obstinately defend a proscribed party. This has thrown them into a disfavour that even their friends perceive. And this disfavour will not surprise men who think that the principal cause of the French Revolution was the moral degradation of the nobility.

M. de Saint-Pierre observed somewhere in his *Etudes de la nature* that if one compares the appearance of French nobles to that of their ancestors whose features have been handed down to us by painting or sculpture, one can see evidence that these families have degenerated. He is more to be believed on this point than on polar fusions and the shape of the earth.<sup>18</sup>

In every state, even in monarchies, there is a certain number of families who can be called *co-sovereigns*, for the nobility is only an extension of sovereignty in such governments. These families are the depositories of a sacred fire that will be extinguished if they lose their *purity*.

It is questionable if these families, once extinguished, can be perfectly replaced. At least it is not necessary to believe that sovereigns can *ennoble*, if we use the term precisely. There are new families that spring up in the administration of the state, that extricate themselves from the common herd in a striking manner, and that arise from among others like a tall sturdy tree in the middle of the brush.<sup>19</sup> Sovereigns may sanction these natural ennoblements, but if they allow themselves to approve too many *on their own authority*, they work for the destruction of their states. Fraudulent nobility was one of the greatest evils of France; other less brilliant empires are weakened and dishonoured by it while awaiting other misfortunes.

<sup>18</sup> [Bernardin de Saint-Pierre, *Etudes de la Nature* (Paris: 1784). This author attributed the biblical flood to an 'effusion' of polar ice.]

<sup>19</sup> [Perhaps an allusion to Joseph de Maistre's own family. His paternal grandfather had been a cloth merchant in Nice; his father had received the title of count for his work in codifying the laws of Savoy.]

Modern philosophy, which likes to talk so much of *chance*, speaks especially of the chance of *birth*; this is one of its favourite texts. But there is no more chance here than in other matters. There are noble families just as there are sovereign families. Can a man make a sovereign? At most he may be used as an instrument for the deposition of one sovereign and the transfer of his state to another sovereign who is already a prince.<sup>20</sup> Furthermore, there has never existed a sovereign family to which one can assign a plebeian origin; if this phenomena should appear it would be epoch-making.<sup>21</sup>

Scale considered, it is the same with nobility as with sovereignty. Without going into all the details, let us just note that if the nobility renounces the national dogmas, the state is lost.<sup>22</sup>

The role played by some nobles in the French Revolution is a thousand times more *terrible* (I do not say more horrible) than anything else we have seen in the Revolution. There is no more frightening, no more decisive sign of the dreadful judgement brought against the French monarchy.

Perhaps it will be asked what these faults have in common with the *émigrés* who detest them? I reply that the individuals who compose nations, families, and even political bodies form a unity; this is a fact. In the second place I reply that the causes of the suffering of the *émigré* nobility are quite anterior to the Revolution. The difference that we see between such-and-such French nobles is, in God's eyes, only a difference of longitude and latitude; it is not because one is here or there that one is what one must be. *Not all those who cry Lord! Lord! will enter into the kingdom.* Men can judge only by appearances; but a given noble at Koblenz may have more reason for self-reproach

<sup>20</sup> And even the way in which human power is used in this circumstance is such as to humiliate it. On this point especially, one may address man with Rousseau's words, *Show me your power, and I will show you your weakness.*

<sup>21</sup> We often hear it said, 'If Richard Cromwell had had his father's genius, he would have made the Protectorate hereditary in his family.' How true!

<sup>22</sup> An Italian scholar has made a singular remark. After observing that the nobility is the natural guardian and, in a sense, the depository of the national religion, and that this phenomenon is more striking the farther back one goes towards the origins of nations and things, he adds, 'So it has to be a great sign that the nation's end has come when the nobles despise the native religion.' Vico, *Principi d'una Scienza nuova*, Bk. II. When the priesthood is part of the state's political structure, and its highest offices are normally occupied by the high nobility, the result is the strongest and most durable of all possible constitutions. So it was that philosophism, the universal solvent, passed its crucial test with the French monarchy.



than a given noble who sat on the left in the so-called *constituent* assembly. Finally, the French nobility has only itself to blame for all its troubles, and when it accepts this fact it will have taken a great step forward. The exceptions, more or less numerous, are worthy of the world's respect, but one can speak only in general terms. Today the unfortunate nobility (who can suffer only an eclipse) must bow its head and resign itself. Some day it will have to embrace in good faith *children who are not its own*. While waiting, it must make no more exterior efforts; perhaps it would even be desirable that they never be seen in a menacing attitude. In any case, emigration was an error, not a crime; the majority thought they were obeying honour. *Numen abire jubet; prohibent discedere leges.*<sup>23</sup> God must absolve them.

There are many other comments one could make on this point, but let us restrict ourselves to what is obvious. The *émigrés* can do nothing, and one can even add that they are nothing, for every day, despite the government, their number diminishes according to the invariable law of the French Revolution that wills that everything happens despite men and against all probabilities.

Long misfortunes having softened the *émigrés*, every day they become more like their fellow citizens, bitterness disappears, and on one side and then another they begin to recall their common fatherland. A hand is extended, and even on the field of battle the other is recognized as brother. The strange amalgam that we have seen for some time has no visible cause, for these laws are not visible, but it is no less real. Therefore it is obvious that the number of the *émigrés* count for nothing. As for the more violent passions of a small number of men, we may neglect worrying about them.<sup>24</sup>

But there is one more important point that I must not pass over in silence. References are made to some imprudent speeches made by young men, thoughtless or embittered by misfortune, in order to frighten the French on the return of these men. I agree, to put all the suppositions against me, these discourses really announce well-decided intentions. But can we believe that those who hold them will be in a situation to execute them after the restoration of the monarchy? That would be to be badly deceived. From the very moment the legitimate government is restored these men will be powerless to

<sup>23</sup> Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, xv, 28. [The god bade him depart; his country's laws prohibited his departure.]

<sup>24</sup> [An explicit disavowal of the ultraroyalists.]

do anything but obey. Anarchy is necessary for revenge; order severely excludes it. The man who at the moment talks only of punishment will then find himself in circumstances that will force him to want only what the law wants, and for his own interest, even he will be a quiet citizen and leave vengeance to the courts. People are always dazzled by the same sophism: 'One party dealt harshly when it ruled; therefore the opposite party will deal harshly when it gets its turn to rule.' Nothing is more false. In the first place, the sophism supposes that both parties have the same vices. This is assuredly not the case. Without insisting too much on the virtues of the royalists, I am sure that I have the world's conscience with me when I simply affirm that there are fewer virtues on the republican side. Besides, even their prejudices, apart from their virtues, ensure that France can suffer from the royalists nothing similar to what it underwent from their enemies.

Already experience provides a prelude to calm the French on this point; they have seen on more than one occasion that the party that suffered everything at the hands of its enemies has not known how to revenge itself when it held its enemies in its power. A few acts of vengeance that caused a great furore prove the same proposition, for it can be seen that only the most scandalous denial of justice can lead to this vengeance and that no one will try to take justice into his own hands if the government can carry it out as well.

There is, moreover, great evidence that the most pressing interest of the king will be to prevent such revenge. Just emerging from the evils of anarchy it is unlikely that he would want to return to it. The very idea of violence will make him pale, and this is the one crime that he will not believe himself capable of pardoning.

In addition France is ready to forsake convulsions and horrors; it wants no more blood. And since public opinion is strong enough at the moment to compromise the party that would want it, one can judge the force of this public opinion when it has the government on its side. After prolonged and terrible evils, Frenchmen will be delighted to place themselves in the arms of the monarchy. Any attack on this tranquillity will truly be a crime of *lèse-nation* that the courts would perhaps not have time to punish.

These reasons are so convincing that no one can be mistaken. Moreover, one must not be duped by these writings in which we see a hypocritical philanthropy condemn the horrors of the Revolution

and then argue from these excesses to establish the necessity of preventing a second. In fact they condemn the Revolution only in order not to excite a universal outcry against themselves; but they love it, they love its authors and its results, and of all the crimes that it spawned they scarcely condemn those with which they could dispense. There is not one of these writings in which one does not find obvious proofs that the authors are inclined to the party they are condemning through shame.

Thus the French, always dupes, are duped on this occasion more than ever; they experience a general fear when they have nothing to fear, and they sacrifice their happiness to satisfy a few miserable rascals.

But if the most obvious theories cannot convince the French, and if they still cannot bring themselves to believe that Providence is the guardian of order and that it is not at all the same thing if one works for it or against it, let us at least judge what will happen by what has happened. And if reasoning eludes our minds let us at least believe history, which is experimental politics. England in the last century presents almost the same spectacle as France in ours. There the fanaticism of liberty, overexcited by that of religion, penetrated souls even more deeply than it has in France, where the cult of liberty has no basis at all. Moreover, what a difference in the character of the two nations and in that of the actors who have played a role on these two stages! Where are, I do not say the Hampdens,<sup>25</sup> but the Cromwells, of France? And nevertheless, despite the burning fanaticism of the republicans, despite the deliberate steadfastness of the national character, despite the too understandable errors of numerous guilty persons and especially of the army, did the restoration of the monarchy in England cause splits similar to those which had spawned a regicide revolution? Show us the atrocious vengeance of the royalists. A few regicides perished under the authority of the law; for the rest, there were neither combats nor private revenge. The return of the king was marked only by a cry of joy which included all England; enemies all embraced one another. The king, surprised by what he saw, was moved to exclaim, 'It is not my fault if I have been rejected so long by such a good people.' The illustrious Clarendon, a witness and reliable historian of these great events, tells us 'that a man could

<sup>25</sup> Hume, vol. xx, ch. lxxii, the year 1660.

not help but wonder where those people dwelt who had done all the mischief and kept the king from enjoying the comfort and support of such excellent subjects for so many years'.<sup>26</sup> Which is to say the *people* no longer recognized the *people*. It could not be better said.

But what brought about this great change? Nothing, or rather, nothing visible. A year before none believed it possible. It is not even known if it was begun by a royalist; for it is an insoluble problem to know when Monk began to serve the monarchy in good faith. But was it not at least a matter of the royalist party imposing a change on the opposite party? Not at all. Monk had only six thousand men; the republicans had five or six times as many, and they occupied all the offices and were in military occupation of the entire kingdom. Nevertheless Monk did not have to fight a single battle; everything was accomplished effortlessly and as if by magic. It will be the same in France. The return to order will not be painful, because it will be natural and because it will be favoured by a secret force whose action is wholly creative. We will see precisely the opposite of what we have seen. Instead of these violent commotions, painful divisions, and perpetual and desperate oscillations, a certain stability, and indefinable peace, a universal well-being will announce the presence of sovereignty. There will be no shocks, no violence, no punishment even, except those which the true nation will approve. Even crime and usurpation will be treated with a measured severity, with a calm justice that belongs to legitimate power only. The king will bind up the wounds of the state with a gentle and paternal hand. In conclusion, this is the great truth with which the French cannot be too greatly impressed: the restoration of the monarchy, what they call the counter-revolution, will be not a *contrary revolution*, but the *contrary of revolution*.

<sup>26</sup> [Clarendon, 1st earl of, Edward Hyde (1609-74). His *History of the Rebellion and Civil Wars in England* was written in France after his exile in 1667 and published 1702-4.]

## CHAPTER ELEVEN

### From a History of the French Revolution by David Hume\*

Eadem Mutata Resurgo  
*[I rise again, transformed, but the same]*

The Long Parliament declared by a solemn oath that it could not be dissolved (p. 181). To assure its power, it never ceased stirring up the people, sometimes inflaming their minds by cunning speeches (p. 176), sometimes causing petitions in support of the Revolution to be sent in from all parts of the realm (p. 133). Abuse in the press was carried to extremes; numerous clubs everywhere produced noisy tumults; fanaticism had its own language, it was a new jargon invented by the fury and hypocrisy of the times (p. 131). Every day produced some new harangue on past grievances (p. 129). All the old institutions were overthrown one after the other (pp. 125, 188). The *self-denial* ordinance and the *new model* bill completely disorganized the army and gave it a new form and new composition which forced many old officers to resign their commissions (p. 13). Every kind of

\* I cite the Basel English edition, 12 volumes, Legrand, 1789. [Maistre's manuscript and all editions appearing during the author's lifetime carried the chapter title 'Fragment d'une Histoire de la Révolution française par David Hume'. In the Vitte edition (1884), this was changed to 'Fragment d'une Histoire de la Révolution anglaise, par David Hume'. See Darcel ed., p. 185, n. 1. Maistre's method in this chapter is to put together passages from Hume's *History of England* so as to show parallels between events in England and the French Revolution. Maistre's translation from Hume's English was generally accurate, though he sometimes shortened passages considerably. In rendering this chapter into English again, I have often used Hume's words when I could find them, but in other cases I have simply translated Maistre's French into English. My aim has been to preserve the effect that Maistre's chapter would have had for French readers. On the use made of Hume by counter-revolutionary writers, see L.L. Bongie, *David Hume, Prophet of Counter-Revolution* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1965).]

crime was attributed to the royalists (p. 148), and the art of deceiving and frightening the people was carried to the point of making them believe that the royalists had mined the Thames (p. 177). No king, no nobility, universal equality, became the watchwords (p. 87). But in the midst of this popular effervescence, there now appeared a separate party, the *Independents*, an enthusiastic sect which ended by enslaving the Long Parliament (p. 186).

Against such a storm, the goodness of the king proved useless; the very concessions which he granted his people were calumniated as having been made in bad faith (p. 186).

It is by these preliminaries that the rebels prepared the fall of Charles I; but a simple assassination would not have fulfilled their design: the crime would not have been national; the shame and danger would have fallen on the murderers only. So it was necessary to conceive another plan, it was necessary to astonish the world with an unheard-of procedure, to make an exterior show of justice and cover cruelty with audacity; it was, in short, necessary to fanaticize the people with notions of perfect equality, to assure the obedience of the masses, and gradually to form a coalition against the monarchy (vol. 10, p. 91).

The destruction of the monarchy was the preliminary to the death of the king. The king was in reality dethroned and the English constitution overthrown (in 1648) by the vote of non-addresses which separated the king from the constitution.

Soon the blackest and most ridiculous calumnies about the king were spread about to kill that respect which is the safeguard of thrones. The rebels omitted nothing that might sully his reputation; they accused him of having delivered fortresses to England's enemies, of having spilled his subjects' blood. It was by calumny that they prepared themselves for violence (p. 94).

During the king's imprisonment at Carisbroke Castle, the usurpers took it upon themselves to subject their unfortunate prince to every kind of hardship. They removed all his servants, they cut off his correspondence with his friends; no amusement was allowed him, nor society, which might relieve his anxious thoughts. At every moment he expected to be assassinated or poisoned,<sup>1</sup> for the idea of a judicial sentence never entered his thoughts (pp. 59, 95).

<sup>1</sup> This was also Louis XVI's expectation. See his historical eulogy.



While the king suffered cruelly from his imprisonment, Parliament was very industrious in publishing how cheerful the king was, how satisfied he was with his present condition.<sup>2</sup>

The great source whence the king derived consolation amidst all his calamities was undoubtedly religion. The king's religion seems to have contained nothing fierce or gloomy, nothing which enraged him against his adversaries, or terrified him with the dismal prospect of futurity. While everything around him bore a hostile aspect, while friends, family, relations were separated from him and unable to serve him, he reposed himself with confidence in the arms of that Being who penetrates and sustains all nature, and whose severities, received with piety and resignation, appeared to the king as the surest pledges of unexhausted favour (pp. 95, 96).

The men of law conducted themselves badly in this circumstance. Bradshaw, a member of this profession, was not ashamed to preside at the court which condemned the king, and Coke became solicitor for the people of England (p. 123). The court was composed of officers of the rebellious army, members of the lower house, and citizens of London, most of them of mean birth (p. 123).

Charles doubted not that he would die; he knew that a king is rarely dethroned without perishing, but he expected murder rather than a solemn trial (p. 122).

In his prison he was already dethroned: all the exterior symbols of sovereignty were withdrawn, and his attendants had orders to serve him without ceremony (p. 122). He soon reconciled himself to rudeness and familiarities as he had done to his other calamities (p. 123).

The king's judges styled themselves *representatives of the people* (p. 124) . . . of the people, the only source of every lawful power (p. 127), and the act of accusation represented that having abused the limited power with which he had been entrusted, he [Charles Stuart] *had traitorously and maliciously erected an unlimited and tyrannical government on the ruins of liberty.*

After the charge was finished, the president told the king that he could speak (p. 125). Charles answered with great temper and dignity (p. 125). It is confessed that the king's behaviour during this last scene of his life does honour to his memory (p. 127). Firm and

<sup>2</sup> We recall having read in Condorcet's newspaper a piece about the king's good appetite on his return from Varennes.

intrepid, he maintained in all his answers the utmost perspicuity and justness both of thought and expression (p. 128). Mild and equable, he rose into no passion at that unusual authority which was assumed over him. His soul, without effort or affectation, seemed only to remain in the situation familiar to it, and to look with contempt on all the efforts of human malice and iniquity (p. 128).

The people, in general, remained in that silence which great passions produce in the human mind. The soldiers, being incessantly plied with all sorts of seductions, were wrought up to a degree of fury, and imagined that the frightful crime with which they soiled themselves was a title of glory (p. 130).

Three days were allowed the king; this interval he passed with great tranquillity, chiefly in reading and devotion. His family were allowed access to him and they received many pious consolations and advises (p. 130). Every night during this interval the king slept as sound as usual. The morning of the fatal day he rose early and employed more than usual care in dressing. A minister of religion, a man endowed with the same mild and steady virtues by which the king himself was so much distinguished, assisted him in his last moments (p. 132).

The street before Whitehall was the place destined for the execution; for it was intended, by choosing that very place in sight of his own palace, to display more evidently the triumph of popular justice over royal majesty. When the king came upon the scaffold, he found it so surrounded by soldiers, that he could not expect to be heard by any of the people: he addressed therefore, his discourse to the few persons who were about him. He forgave all his enemies and accused none; he expressed his wishes for his people. A prelate who was assisting him called to him, 'There is, sire, but one stage more, which though troublesome, is yet a very short one; it will carry you from earth to heaven.' 'I go', replied the king, 'from a corruptible to an incorruptible crown, where no disturbance can have place.'

At one blow was his head severed from his body. The executioner held up to the spectators the head, streaming with blood, and cried aloud, 'This is the head of a traitor!' (pp. 132, 133).

This prince deserves the epithet of a *good*, rather than of a *great* man. At times his good sense was disfigured by a deference to persons of a capacity inferior to his own. He was more fitted to rule in a regular established government, than either to give way or to subdue

the encroachments of a popular assembly (p. 136). If he lacked the courage to act he always had courage to suffer. Unhappily, his fate threw him into a difficult period; and if his political prudence was not sufficient to extricate himself from so perilous a situation, he may be excused; since, even after the event, when it is commonly easy to correct all errors, one is at a loss to know what he should have done (p. 137). Exposed without assistance to the assault of the most furious and implacable factions, it was never permitted him, but with the most fatal consequences, to commit the smallest mistake; a condition too rigorous to be imposed on the greatest human capacity (p. 137).

Some historians have rashly questioned the good faith of this prince; but, for this reproach, the most malignant scrutiny of his conduct, which in every circumstance is now thoroughly known, affords not any reasonable foundation. On the contrary, if we consider the extreme difficulties to which he was so frequently reduced, and compare his conduct to his declarations, we shall avow, that probity and honour ought justly to be numbered among his most shining qualities (p. 137).

The death of the king put a seal on the destruction of the monarchy. It was abolished by a decree of the commons. The commons ordered a new great seal to be engraved with this legend: *On the first year of freedom*. The forms of all public business were changed, from the king's name, to that of the keepers of the liberties of England (p. 142). The *court of king's bench* was called the *court of public bench*. The king's statue in the Exchange was thrown down, and on the pedestal these words were inscribed: *Exit tyrannus, regum ultimus* (p. 143).

Charles, in dying, left his people an image of himself (*Eikon Basilike*)<sup>3</sup> in that famous work, a masterpiece of elegance, purity, neatness, and simplicity. It is not easy to conceive the general compassion excited towards the king, by the publishing of a work so full of piety, meekness, and humanity. Many have not scrupled to ascribe to that book the subsequent restoration of the royal family (p. 146).

It is seldom that the people gain anything by revolutions in government; because the new settlement, jealous and insecure, must commonly be supported with more expense and severity than the old (p. 100).

<sup>3</sup> [*Eikon Basilike* (Greek for 'royal image'), a book purporting to be the spiritual autobiography of the king, was published shortly after the king's execution.]

On no occasion was the truth of this maxim more sensibly felt, than in the present situation in England. Complaints against the oppression of ship money, against the tyranny of the star chamber, had roused the people to arms: and having gained a complete victory over the crown, they found themselves loaded with a multiplicity of taxes, formerly unknown; and scarcely an appearance of law and liberty remained in the administration. Every office was entrusted to the most ignoble part of the nation; a base populace exalted above their superiors; hypocrites, exercising iniquity under the visor of religion (p. 100). The loan of great sums of money was exacted from all such as lay under any suspicion. Never had England known a more severe and arbitrary government, than was exercised by the patrons of liberty (pp. 112, 113).

The first act of the Long Parliament had been an oath by which it had declared that it could never be dissolved (p. 181).

The confusions which overspread England after the execution of Charles I, proceeded less from the spirit of innovation which agitated the ruling party than from the dissolution of all old authority. Every man had framed the model of a republic; and however new it was, or fantastical, he was eager in recommending it to his fellow-citizens, or even imposing it by force. Each plan, being founded on supposed inspiration, not any principles of human reason, had no means, besides cant and low rhetoric, by which it could recommend itself to others (p. 147). The *levellers* disclaimed all dependence and subordination.<sup>4</sup> One particular sect expected the millennium;<sup>5</sup> the *Antinomians* insisted that the obligations of morality and natural law were suspended. A considerable party declaimed against the tithes and a hireling priesthood, and were resolved that the magistrate should not support by power or revenue any ecclesiastical establishment; each should have the liberty of supporting the one he preferred. All religions should be tolerated, except Catholicism. Another party inveighed against the law and its professors; and, on pretence of rendering more simple the distribution of justice, were desirous of abolishing the whole system of English jurisprudence, which seemed interwoven with monarchical government (p. 148). Ardent repub-

<sup>4</sup> 'We want a government . . . where distinctions are born only of equality, where the citizen is submissive to the magistrate, the magistrate to the people, and the people to justice.' Robespierre. See the *Moniteur*, 7 February 1794.

<sup>5</sup> This particular parallel should not be lightly overlooked.

licans changed their baptismal names, substituting for them names as extravagant as their spirit of revolution (p. 242). They decided that marriage was a simple contract, which must be celebrated before the civil magistrates. There is even a legend in England that they carried their fanaticism to the point of suppressing the word *kingdom* in the Lord's Prayer, saying *thy republic come*. Cromwell entertained a project of instituting a college, in imitation of that of Rome, for the *propagation* of the faith (p. 285).

Even the less fanatical republicans supposed themselves above all laws, professions, and oaths. The bands of society were everywhere loosened; and the irregular passions of men were encouraged by speculative principles, still more unsocial and irregular (p. 148).

The royalists, being degraded from their authority and plundered of their property, were inflamed with the highest resentment and indignation against those ignoble adversaries who had reduced them to subjection. From inclination and principle, they zealously attached themselves to the son of their unfortunate monarch, whose memory they respected and whose tragic death they deplored.

On the other hand, the Presbyterians, the founders of the republic, whose credit had first supported the arms of the parliament, were enraged to find that, by the treachery or superior cunning of their associates, the fruits of all their successful labours were ravished from them. This discontent pushed them towards the royalists without winning them over completely; they still had many prejudices to overcome, many fears and jealousies to be allayed, ere they could cordially entertain thoughts of restoring the family which they had so grievously offended.

After having murdered their sovereign with so many appearing circumstances of solemnity and justice, and so much real violence and even fury, these men began to think of giving themselves a more regular form of government. They named a council of state which was accorded executive authority. This council gave orders to all the generals and admirals, received all addresses, executed the laws, and digested all business before it was introduced into Parliament (pp. 150-1). The administration was divided among several committees which tried to engross everything (p. 134) and rendered account to none (pp. 166-7).

The usurpers of authority, both by the turn of their disposition and by the nature of the instruments which they employed, were

better qualified for acts of force and vigour than for the slow and deliberate work of legislation; nevertheless, the men of the assembly pretended to employ themselves with legislation for the country. They worked on a new plan of representation; and as soon as they should have settled the nation, they professed their intention of restoring the power to the people, from whom they acknowledged they had entirely derived it (p. 151).

In the meantime, the parliament judged it necessary to enlarge the laws against treason beyond those narrow bounds within which they had been confined during the monarchy. They even comprehended verbal offences, nay, intentions, though they never appeared in any overt act against the state. To affirm the present government to be a usurpation, to assert that the parliament or council of state was tyrannical or illegal, to endeavour subverting their authority, or stirring up sedition against them: these offences were declared to be high treason. The power of imprisonment, which had been taken from the king, it was found necessary to restore to the council of state; and all the jails in England were filled with men whom the jealousies and fears of the ruling party had represented as dangerous (p. 163).

It was great sport for these new masters to deprive the landed nobility of their titles; when the brave Montrose was executed in Scotland, *James Graham* was the only name his judges vouchsafed to give him (p. 180).

Besides the customs and excise, ninety thousand pounds a month were levied on land for the subsistence of the army. The sequestrations and compositions of the royalists, the sale of the crown lands, and of the dean and chapter lands, though they yielded great sums, were not sufficient to support the vast expenses, and as was suspected, the great *depredations*, of the parliament and of their creatures (pp. 163-4).

Even the royal palaces were pulled in pieces, and the materials in them sold. All the king's furniture was put to sale: his pictures, disposed of at very low prices, enriched all the collections of Europe; pieces which had cost 50,000 guineas were given away for 300 (p. 388).

The republicans acquired little popularity or credit. These men had not that large thought nor those comprehensive views, which might qualify them for acting the part of legislators. Egotists and hypocrites, they made small progress in fixing a plan of government,



so that the nation began to apprehend that they intended to establish themselves as a perpetual legislature, and to confine the whole power to sixty or seventy persons, who called themselves the *parliament of the commonwealth of England*. While they pretended to bestow new liberties upon the nation, they found themselves obliged to infringe even the most valuable of those, which, through time immemorial, had been transmitted from their ancestors. Not daring to entrust the trials of treason to juries, who would have been little favourable to the commonwealth, the parliament erected a high court of justice, which was to receive indictments from the council of state (pp. 206–7). This court was composed of men devoted to the ruling party, without name or character, determined to sacrifice everything to their own safety or ambition.

As for royalists taken prisoners in battle, they were put to death by sentence of court martial (p. 207).

The only solid support of the republican independent faction which, though it formed so small a part of the nation, had violently usurped the government of the whole, was a numerous army (p. 149). Such is the influence of established government, that the commonwealth, though founded in usurpation the most unjust and unpopular, had authority sufficient to raise everywhere the militia of the counties; and these, united with the regular forces, bent all their efforts against the king (p. 199). At Newbury (in 1643) the militia of London equalled what could be expected from the most veteran forces. The officers preached to the soldiers and they marched to battle singing fanatical hymns (p. 13).

A numerous army served equally to retain everyone in implicit subjection to established authority, and to strike a terror into foreign nations. The power of peace and war was lodged in the same hands with that of imposing taxes. The military genius of the people had, by the civil contests, been roused from its former lethargy. The confusion into which all things had been thrown, had given opportunity to men of low stations to break through obscurity, and to raise themselves by their courage to commands which they were well qualified to exercise, but to which their birth could never have entitled them (p. 209). We see a man of fifty (Blake) suddenly transfer from the land service to the navy and distinguish himself in the most brilliant manner (p. 210). During the variety of ridiculous and distracted scenes which the civil government exhibited in England, the military

force was exerted with vigour, conduct, and unanimity; and never did the kingdom appear more formidable to all foreign nations (p. 248).

A government totally military and despotic, is almost sure, after some time, to fall into impotence and languor; but when it immediately succeeds a legal constitution, it may, at first, to foreign nations appear very vigorous and active, and may exert with more unanimity that power, spirit, and riches, which had been acquired under a better form. This was the spectacle which England presented at that time. The moderate temper and unwarlike genius of the last two princes, the extreme difficulties under which they laboured at home, and the great security which they enjoyed from foreign enemies, had rendered them negligent of the transactions on the continent; and England had been, in a manner, overlooked in the general system of Europe; but the republican government suddenly put it in the forefront again (p. 263). Notwithstanding the late war and bloodshed, the power of England had never, in any period, appeared so formidable to the neighbouring kingdoms (p. 209), and to foreign nations (p. 218). The weight of England, even under its most legal and bravest princes, was never more sensibly felt than during this unjust and violent usurpation (p. 263).

The parliament, elated by successes, thought that everything must yield to their fortunate arms; they treated second-rate powers with great haughtiness, and for real or claimed offences, declared war or demanded solemn satisfaction (p. 221).

This famous parliament, which had filled all Europe with the renown of its actions, and with astonishment at its crimes, nevertheless allowed itself to be enslaved by a single man (p. 128); and foreign nations stood astonished to see a nation, so turbulent and unruly, who, for some doubtful encroachments on their privileges, had dethroned and murdered an excellent prince, descended from a long line of monarchs, now at last subdued and reduced to slavery by one who, a few years before was no better than a private gentleman, whose name was not known in the nation, and who was little regarded even in that low sphere to which he had always been confined (p. 236).<sup>6</sup>

<sup>6</sup> 'So little were these men endowed with the spirit of legislation that they boasted that they had employed only four days in drawing this instrument which placed Cromwell at the head of the republic.' (Ibid.) The Constitution of 1795 may be recalled here. As they said in Paris after the fall of its makers, *it was made in a few days by a few juveniles.*

The conduct of this same tyrant in foreign affairs drew a consideration to his country, which, since the reign of Elizabeth, it seemed to have totally lost. He seemed to ennoble, instead of debasing, that people whom he had reduced to subjection, and their national vanity, being gratified, made them bear with more patience all the indignities and calamities under which they laboured (pp. 280—81).

It seems now proper to look abroad to the general state of Europe, and to consider the measures which England at this time embraced in its negotiations with the neighbouring princes (p. 262).

Richelieu was first minister in France. His emissaries had furnished fuel to the flame of rebellion when it first broke out; but after the conflagration had diffused itself, the French court, observing the materials to be of themselves sufficiently combustible, found it unnecessary any longer to animate the British malcontents to an opposition to their sovereign. On the contrary, they offered their mediation for composing the internal disorders; and their ambassadors, from decency, pretended to act in concert with the court of England in exile (p. 264).

Nevertheless, Charles received but few civilities, and still less support, from the French court (pp. 170, 266). One morning the Princess Henrietta was obliged to lie abed for want of a fire to warm her. To such a condition was reduced, in the midst of Paris, a queen of England, and daughter of Henry IV of France (p. 266).

They treated Charles with such affected indifference, that he thought it more decent to withdraw, and prevent the indignity of being desired to leave the kingdom (p. 267).

Spain was the first Power that recognized the republic, even though its royal family was related to that of England. It sent an ambassador to London and received one from the parliament (p. 208).

Sweden having at this time achieved the height of its greatness, the new republic anxiously courted the alliance of this power and obtained it (p. 263).

The king of Portugal had dared close his ports to the republican admiral; but soon dreading so dangerous a foe to his newly acquired dominion, and sensible of the unequal contest in which he was engaged, made all possible submissions to the haughty republic, and was at last admitted to negotiate the renewal of his alliance with England.

The people in the United Provinces were much attached to Charles's interests. Besides his connection with the family of Orange, which was extremely beloved by the populace, all men regarded with compassion his helpless condition, and expressed the greatest abhorrence against the murder of his father. But the states were uneasy at his presence. They dreaded the parliament, so formidable in its power, and so prosperous in all its enterprises. They apprehended the most precipitate resolutions from such violent and haughty dispositions, and they found it necessary to satisfy the English commonwealth, by removing the king to a distance from them (p. 169).

Cardinal Mazarin was artful and vigilant, supple and patient, false and intriguing. All circumstances of respect were paid to the daring usurper, who had imbrued his hands in the blood of his sovereign, a prince so nearly related to the royal family of France. Mazarin wrote to Cromwell and *expressed his regret that his urgent affairs should deprive him of the honour which he had long wished for, of paying in person his respects to the greatest man in world* (p. 307).

Cromwell treated as an equal with the French king, and in a treaty between the two nations, the protector's name was inserted before that of Louis XIV in that copy which remained in England (p. 268, note).

The Prince Palatine much neglected his uncle, and paid court to the parliament; he accepted a pension of eight thousand pounds a year from them, and took a place in their assembly of divines (p. 263, note). Such was the ascendancy of the republic with foreign princes.

And in England itself, there were great numbers at that time who made it a principle always to adhere to any power which was uppermost, and to support the established government (p. 239). At the head of this system was the illustrious and gallant Blake, who said to his seamen, *It is still our duty to fight for our country, into what hands soever the government may fall* (p. 279).

Against an order of things so well established, the royalists were reduced to dubious ventures which turned against them. The government had spies everywhere, and it was not difficult to obtain intelligence of a confederacy so generally diffused, among a party who valued themselves more on zeal and courage, than on secrecy and sobriety (p. 259). The royalists fancied that everyone who was dissatisfied like them, had also embraced the same views and inclinations.

They did not consider that the old parliamentary party, though many of them were displeased with Cromwell, who had dispossessed them of their power, were still more apprehensive of any success to the royal cause; whence besides a certain prospect of the same consequence, they had so much reason to dread the severest vengeance for their past transgressions (p. 259).

The situation of the royalist conspirators was deplorable. Their very conspiracies were regarded as a fortunate event since they justified tyrannical severities. Many of the royalists were thrown into prison; an edict was issued exacting the tenth penny from the whole party, in order to make them pay the expenses to which their mutinous disposition continually exposed the public. All the royalists were obliged anew to redeem themselves by great sums of money; and many of them were reduced by these multiplied disasters to extreme poverty. Whoever was known to be disaffected, or even lay under any suspicion, was exposed to the new exaction (pp. 260-1).

Near one half of the goods and chattels, and at least one half of the lands, rents, and revenues of the kingdom, had been sequestered. Besides pitying the ruin and desolation of so many ancient and honourable families, indifferent spectators could not but blame the hardship of punishing with such severity actions which the law strictly required of every subject (pp. 66-7). The severities exercised against the Episcopal clergy were no less; by the most moderate computation, it appears that above one half of the established clergy had been turned out to beggary and want, for no other crime than their adhering to the civil and religious principles in which they had been educated, and for their attachment to those laws under whose countenance they had at first embraced that profession (p. 67).

The royalists had been instructed by the king to remain quiet, and to cover themselves under the appearance of republicans (p. 254). For himself, poor and neglected, he wandered Europe, changing his place of exile according to circumstance and consoling himself for present calamities with the hope of a better future (p. 152).

The condition of that monarch, to all the world, seemed totally desperate, the more so that, seeming to seal his fate, all the commons had signed without hesitation an engagement not to alter the present government (p. 325).<sup>7</sup> His friends had been baffled in every attempt

<sup>7</sup> In 1659, a year before the Restoration! I bow before the will of the people.

for his service: the scaffold had often streamed with the blood of the more active royalists: the spirits of many were broken with tedious imprisonments: the estates of all were burdened by the fines and confiscations which had been levied upon them: no one durst openly avow himself of that party: and so small did their number seem to a superficial view, that, even should the nation recover its liberty, which was now deemed nowise possible, it was uncertain what form of government it should embrace (p. 342). But amidst all these gloomy prospects, *fortune*,<sup>8</sup> by surprising revolution, was now paving the way for the king to mount, in peace and triumph, the throne of his ancestors (p. 342).

When Monk began to put his great project into execution, the nation had fallen into total anarchy. He advanced with his army, which was near six thousand men: the scattered forces in England were above five times more numerous. In all counties through which Monk passed, the prime gentry flocked to him with addresses, expressing their earnest desire that he would be instrumental in restoring the nation to peace and tranquillity, and to the enjoyment of those liberties which by law were their birthright, but of which, during so many years, they had been fatally bereaved (p. 352). Men were sent to confirm the general in his inclination to a free parliament (p. 353). The tyranny and anarchy which now equally oppressed the kingdom; the experience of past distractions, the dread of future convulsions, the indignation against military usurpation, all these motives had united every party and formed a tacit coalition between the royalists and Presbyterians. These last agreed that they had gone too far, and the lessons of experience finally recruited them with the rest of England in desiring the king's restoration, the only remedy for all these fatal evils (pp. 333, 353).<sup>9</sup>

Monk pretended not to favour these addresses (p. 353). How early he entertained designs for the king's restoration, we know not with certainty (p. 345). When he arrived in London, he told the parliament that he had been employed as an instrument of Providence for effecting their restoration (p. 354). He added that it was to the parliament itself to decide the summoning of a new assembly which might

<sup>8</sup> No doubt!

<sup>9</sup> In 1659. But four years earlier, the royalists, according to the same historian, foolishly miscalculated when they imagined that enemies of the government were friends of the king. See p. 242.



finally give contentment to the nation, and it was sufficient for the public security, if the fanatical party and the royalists were excluded; since the principles of these factions were destructive either of government or liberty (p. 355).

He even obeyed the Long Parliament in a violent measure (p. 356). But as soon as intelligence was conveyed of his decision for a new convocation, joy and exultation appeared throughout the kingdom. The royalists and Presbyterians mingled in common joy and transport to curse their tyrants (p. 358). All these motives united every party, except the most desperate (p. 353).<sup>10</sup>

Determined republicans, particularly the late king's judges, did not neglect their own interests in these circumstances. By themselves or their emissaries, they represented to the soldiers, that all those brave actions which had been performed during the war, and which were so meritorious in the eyes of the parliament, would be regarded as the deepest crimes by the royalists and would expose the army to the severest vengeance: that in vain did that party make professions of moderation and lenity; the king's death, the execution of so many nobility and gentry, the sequestration and imprisonment of the rest, were in the eyes of the royalists unpardonable crimes (p. 366).

But the agreement of all parties formed one of those popular torrents, where the most indifferent, or even the most averse, are transported with the general passion. The enthusiasts themselves seemed to be disarmed of their fury; suspended between despair and astonishment, they gave way to measures which they found it would be impossible to withstand (p. 363). The voice of the nation, without noise, *but with infinite ardour*, called for the king's restoration.<sup>11</sup> *The kingdom was still almost entirely in the hands of the republicans;*<sup>12</sup> and some among them began to renew demands for *conditions* and to recall old proposals: but the general opinion seemed to condemn all these capitulations with the sovereign. Harassed with convulsions and disorders, men were terrified at the mention of negotiations or delays. The passion too for liberty, having been carried to such violent

<sup>10</sup> In 1660; but in 1655, 'they feared the restoration of the monarchy more than they hated the established government' (p. 209).

<sup>11</sup> But the preceding year, THE PEOPLE signed, *without hesitation*, an agreement to maintain the republic. Thus, it took only some 365 days for the heart of the Sovereign to change from *hate or indifference to infinite ardour*.

<sup>12</sup> Note well!

extremes, began, by a natural movement, to give place to a spirit of loyalty and obedience. After the legal concessions made by the late king, the constitution seemed to be sufficiently secured (p. 364).

The parliament, whose functions were about to expire, had voted that no one should be elected who had himself, or whose father, had borne arms for the late king (p. 365); for they knew that to call a free parliament, and to restore the royal family, were visibly, in the present disposition of the kingdom, one and the same measure (p. 361); but little regard was anywhere paid to this ordinance (p. 365).

Such was the turn affairs took in England, when . . .

Caetera DISIDERANTUR.

## Postscript

The latest edition of this work<sup>1</sup> was nearing completion when certain completely trustworthy Frenchmen assured me that the book *Développement des principes fondamentaux*, etc., which I cite in Chapter 8, contains maxims that the king does not approve.<sup>2</sup>

‘The authors of the book in question’, they tell me, ‘are magistrates who reduce the right of the Estates-General to that of presenting grievances and attribute to the parlements the executive power of verifying all laws, even those which are the result of a request from the Estates, which is to say they elevate the magistracy above the nation.’

I avow that I had not perceived this monstrous error in their book (and which I do not share); this error even appeared to me to be excluded by certain of its texts, quoted on pages 64 and 65 of my work, and it can be seen by my note on page 68 that the book in question can give rise to objections of quite another sort.

If, as I am assured, the authors have deviated from true principles in reference to the legitimate rights of the French nation, I am not surprised that their work, otherwise full of excellent things, has alarmed the king, for even those persons who have never had the honour of meeting him know by a great many unimpeachable witnesses that these sacred rights have no more loyal protector than

<sup>1</sup> This is the third in five months, counting the pirated French edition that has just appeared. This last faithfully copied all the errors of the first, and added others as well.

<sup>2</sup> [Maistre had received a letter from the count d’Avaray expressing the king’s disapproval. See *Joseph de Maistre et Blacas*, ed. E. Daudet (Paris: Plan-Nourrit, 1908), p. 3.]

himself and that nothing would offend him more than the preaching of contrary systems.

I repeat that I read this book on the *Développement*, etc., with no systematic view. Long separated from my books, obliged to use those that I found rather than those I would have preferred, often reduced to citing from memory, I needed a collection of this kind to collect my ideas. It was recommended to me (I must say it) by the stand it took against the monarchy's enemies. But if it contains errors that I overlooked, I sincerely disavow them. Alien to all systems, all parties, and all hatreds by both reflexion and position, I will assuredly be most satisfied if every reader will read me with intentions as pure as those that dictated my work.

In conclusion, if I wanted to study the character of the different powers under the old French constitution, if I wanted to go back to the source of all these questions and develop clear ideas on the essence, function, rights, complaints, and wrongs of the parlement, I would go beyond the bounds of a postscript, or of my book even, and moreover, I would be undertaking a perfectly useless task. If the French nation recovers its king, as every friend of order must hope, and if there are regular national assemblies, the various powers will naturally find their places without contradictions or difficulties. Whatever the case, the exaggerated claims of the parlements, the discussion and quarrels to which they gave birth, all appear to me to be entirely a matter of ancient history.

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UNIVERSITY PRESS  
[www.cambridge.org](http://www.cambridge.org)

ISBN 0-521-46628-8



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