XXVII

PRELIMINARIES OF THE FRENCH REVOLUTION

Scientific and Geographical Discoveries. — The eighteenth century was for the sciences what the seventeenth had been for letters, and the sixteenth for arts and creeds. It was a period of renovation. Physics was regenerated by the brilliant electrical experiments of Franklin, Volta and Galvani, who invented the lightning-rod and the voltaic battery. So was mathematical analysis by Lagrange and Laplace; botany by Linnæus and Jussieu; zoölogy by Buffon, who also introduced geology, while Lavoisier gave to the science of chemistry firm foundations. Mankind, when master of the laws of nature, wished at once to make them of advantage. In 1775 vaccination was discovered. In 1783 a steamboat ascended the Saône and the first balloon was launched into the air.

At the same time the skilful navigators, Cook, Bougainville and La Pérouse, completed the work of the great sailors of the fifteenth century, not through hope of gain or from religious sentiment as three hundred years earlier, but in the interest of science.

Letters in the Eighteenth Century. — While the physicists were discovering new forces and the navigators new lands, the writers for their part were revealing a new world. Literature was not, as in the preceding century, controlled by art. It had invaded everything and claimed the right to regulate everything. The most virile forces of the mind seemed directed to the advancement of public welfare. Men no longer labored to make fine verses but to utter fine maxims. They no longer depicted the whims of society for the sake of a laugh, but for the purpose of reforming society itself. Literature became a weapon which all, the imprudent as well as the skilful, tried to wield. And by a strange inconsistency, those who had the most to suffer from this inroad of literary men into the field of politics were the ones who applauded it the most. This society of the eighteenth

century, frivolous and sensual as it was, nevertheless cherished an admiration for mental power. Talent almost took the place of birth.

Three men headed the movement. They were: Voltaire, whose whims and passions and vices cannot be forgotten, but who fought all his life long for liberty of thought; Montesquieu, who studied the reason of laws and the nature of governments, who taught men to examine and compare existing constitutions in order to seek therein the best, which he found in liberty-loving England; and lastly, Rousseau with his *Social Contract*, wherein he proclaimed the doctrine of national sovereignty and universal suffrage. At their side the encyclopedists reviewed human knowledge and set it forth in a manner often menacing to social order and always hostile to religion. Finally Quesnay created the new science of political economy. Thus human thought, hitherto confined to metaphysical and religious speculations, or absorbed in unselfish worship of the Muses, now claimed the right to attack the most difficult problems of society. And all, philosophers as well as economists, sought the solution on the side of liberty. From the school of Quesnay had sprung the axiom, "Let well enough alone," just as in politics D'Argesson had said, "Do not govern too much."

Disagreement between Ideas and Institutions. — Thus the mental agitation, formerly excited by the discussion of dogmas, now was produced by wholly terrestrial interests. Men no longer sought to determine divine attributes, or the limits of grace and free will, but they studied man and society, rights and obligations. The Middle Ages and feudalism, when they expired under the hand of kings, had left the ground covered with their fragments, so the most shocking inequalities and the strangest confusion were to be met on every side. Therefore the complaints were vigorous, numerous and pressing.

Men desired that government should no longer be a frightful labyrinth wherein the most clever must lose his way. They meant that the public finances should cease to be pillaged by the king, his ministers and the court; that personal liberty should be secured against arbitrary orders of arrest or lettres de cachet, and that property should be protected from confiscation. They wished that the criminal code, still aided by torture, should become less sanguinary and the civil code more equitable.

They demanded religious toleration instead of dogma imposed under penalty of death; law, founded on principles of natural and rational right, instead of the privilege of a few and the arbitrary government of all; unity of weights and measures, instead of the most extreme confusion; taxes paid by every one, instead of the taxation of poverty and the exemption of wealth; the emancipation of labor and free competition, instead of monopoly of corporations; and free admission to the public offices, instead of favoritism shown to birth and fortune.

To accomplish this a revolution was necessary and every one saw that it was coming. As early as 1719, Fénelon exclaimed, "The dilapidated machine still continues to work because of the former impetus imparted to it, but it will go to pieces at the first shock."

Reforms effected by Governments. — These words did not apply to France alone. They included the whole of absolutist Europe. If the people did not everywhere understand the need of reforms, the princes felt the necessity of undertaking them. Bold or clever ministers like Pombal of Lisbon, Aranda at Madrid and Tanucci at Naples, encouraged industry, agriculture and science, opened roads, canals and schools, suppressed privileges and abuses, and banished the Jesuits, who seemed to embody all the evil influences of the past. The Grand Duke of Tuscany created provinces by transforming pestilential marshes into fertile lands. The king of Sardinia allowed his subjects to emancipate themselves from feudal taxes. Joseph II in Austria abolished tithes, seignorial rights, forced labor and convents, and subordinated the Church to the state. In Sweden Gustavus III diminished the church festivals, forbade torture and doubled the product of the iron and copper mines. We have already noted the reforms of Frederick II in Prussia.

Catherine the Great cultivated the acquaintance of Voltaire, Diderot, D'Alembert, so as to influence public opinion through them. She had a magnificent constitution drawn up, which, however, she did not put into execution. She built schools which remained empty. When the governor of Moscow was in despair at the lack of scholars, she wrote him: "My dear prince, do not complain that the Russians have no desire to learn. If I set up schools, it is not for our own sake, but because of Europe which is watching us. As soon as our peasants wish to become enlightened, neither you nor I shall remain in our places." Cardinal Pole had expressed the same idea at the beginning of the Reformation: "It is dangerous to make men too learned."

Thus a new spirit of reform was breathing over Europe. It was social and no longer a religious reform. It was preached by philosophers or economists and not by monks or theologians. The princes now too placed themselves at the head of the movement, hoping to derive profit therefrom, as they had done from the secularizations of church property during the Lutheran and the Anglican Reformations. They sought to promote the welfare of their peoples. They freed them at the expense of the feudal and ecclesiastical aristocracy, from vexatious or onerous burdens, but they specially labored all the time to augment their own revenues and strength. These princes all said, as did the emperor of Austria: "My trade is to be a royalist." So they preserved the discretionary power which feudal anarchy had permitted them to grasp, but which the enlarging interests of the people doomed them no longer to retain.

Thus, at bottom, nothing was changed. Despite this paternal solicitude and from default of regular institutions, everything still depended on individuals, so that public prosperity fluctuated with those who remained its supreme dispensers. Hence Spain under Charles IV and Godoy again fell as low as under Charles II. The days of the Lazzaroni flourished once more at Naples under Queen Caroline and her minister, Acton. Joseph II disturbed Austria without regenerating it, and Catherine II played with reforms for her people. In Prussia alone a great man did great things. In France when skilful ministers, who wished to do them likewise, were expelled from power, the nation undertook to accomplish the reforms itself.

Last Years of Louis XV (1763–1774). — At the treaty of Aix-la-Chapelle (1748), France was still the leading military power of Europe. This rank was taken from her by the disgraces of the Seven Years' War. Afterwards the army had no chance of reviving its ancient renown, for French intervention in the affairs of Eastern Europe was mostly limited to diplomatic notes and a few volunteers. The acquisition of Corsica (1769) under Louis XV was the result of a bargain with Genoa, which sold the island for 40,000,000 francs. The acquisition of Lorraine was only the execution of a treaty, for which the occupation of the duchy

for almost a century by French troops had long since paved the way. Hence there was little glory in those territorial gains. But the war in America, a few years later, shed some brilliancy upon the navy. While Prussia, Austria and Russia were murdering one nation, France had the honor of aiding in the birth of another. The American Revolution was popular, so France resumed before the end of the century something of the proud bearing which Rosbach had taken from her.

At home Louis XV disgraced the monarchy by his vices and hastened its ruin by his political conduct. The expulsion of the Jesuits offended one party and the suppression of the parliaments was a blow at another. Frequent and arbitrary arrests exasperated the public mind. Public interests received a shock in the proceedings of the comptroller-general, Abbé Terray, who excused the bankruptcy he declared by saying, "The king is the master." Louis realized that a terrible expiation was approaching, but he thought he himself would escape it. "Things will last quite as long as I shall. My successor must get out of the scrape as best he can."

Louis XVI until the Revolution. — This sovereign was the most honest and the weakest of men. He abolished forced labor and torture. He summoned to the ministry Turgot, who could have forestalled the Revolution by reforms or at least could have controlled and guided it. But when the courtiers complained, he dismissed him, saying, "Only Monsieur and I love the people." Necker, the Genoese banker, did not succeed in covering the frightful deficit which the expenses of the American war increased. The state existed only by loans. Calonne, in the space of three years and in time of peace, increased the debt 500,000,000 francs. An Assembly of Notables, convoked in 1787, could point out no remedy. On all sides men clamored for the States General. The government, at the end of its resources, promised to convoke them. Necker, recalled to the ministry, rendered the decision that the number of deputies from the Third Estate should equal that of the other two orders. This was the same thing as deciding that by the Third Estate alone the great reforms were to be effected.

XXVIII

THE FRENCH REVOLUTION

(1789–1792)

Divine Right and National Sovereignty. — In the Middle Ages, for the purpose of combating feudalism, the jurists had again asserted the proposition of the Roman jurisconsults concerning the absolute power of the prince. The Church with her religious authority had sanctioned this doctrine, borrowed from Oriental monarchies, which made the kings through the religious rite of coronation the direct representatives of God on earth. On the other hand, the doctrine of the sovereignty of the people, which had ruled the Greek, German, Celtic and Roman world, and which even Augustus had made the basis of his power, had never been completely forgotten and proscribed. This doctrine had been many times reasserted. Thus did in France the States General of 1484, in Spain, the Aragonese, who imposed upon their kings so harsh an oath. In England it was announced before the Tudors and repeated under Henry VI by Chancellor Fortescue, who declared that governments had been constituted by the peoples and existed only for their benefit. Again was it maintained under William III by Locke, who proclaimed the necessity of the common consent. In the eighteenth century it was set forth by the majority of writers. Thus the most ancient system in the West was that of national sovereignty. The principle of divine right, represented by Louis XIV and James I, had come later into the field. Reason and history were against it. It was accepted only as an accidental political form which had had certain temporary advantages and on that account, a temporary validity.

In the France of 1789, the absolute monarchy by right divine found that its faults had reduced it to such a condition that it was impossible for it to govern. After royalty ceased to live upon the revenues of its own possessions,

it had set up as an axiom of public law that, for the common weal of the state, the Third Estate would contribute its goods, the nobility its blood, and the clergy its prayers. Now the court clergy prayed but little, the nobility no longer formed all the army; but the Third Estate still remained faithful to its functions. It still continued to pay the taxes and it paid more every year. As the monarchy increased in prodigality, the more dependent did it become upon the Third Estate, and the more inevitable did it render the moment when, tired of paying, the Third Estate would demand a reckoning. That awful day of account is known as the Revolution of 1789.

The court wanted the States General to occupy themselves solely with financial affairs and then, as soon as the deficit was covered and the debts paid, the deputies to go home. But France was suffering from two maladies, one financial and one political, from the deficit and from abuses. To heal the former, economy was necessary together with a new system of taxation. To heal the latter, entire reorganization of the power was needed. Royalty had undergone many transformations since the times of the Roman emperors. It had been barbarian with Clovis, feudal with Philip Augustus, and by right divine with Louis XIV. In its latest form it had furnished unity of territory and unity of authority, but it must now submit to another change. France, with her immense development of industry, commerce, science, public spirit and personal property, now had interests too complex and needs too numerous to trust itself to the omnipotence of a single man. She required a guarantee against the unlucky hazards of a royal birth or the frivolity of incapable ministers.

The National Assembly until the Capture of the Bastile. — On May 5, 1789, the deputies assembled at Versailles. The clergy and nobility were represented by 561 persons, while the Third Estate, or ninety-six per cent of the population, had 584 or a majority of twenty-three votes. This majority was an illusion unless they voted as individuals and not as orders. The whole spirit of '89, briefly expressed, consisted in establishing equality before the law and guaranteeing it by liberty. Now this spirit had penetrated even the privileged classes. Many of their members came and joined the deputies of the Third Estate who, assembled in

the common hall, had proclaimed themselves the National Constituent or Constitutional Assembly.

On June 27 the fusion of the three orders was accomplished. This the court tried to prevent, first by closing the place of assembly and then by having the king make a threatening speech. The sole effect of their opposition was to determine the deputies to declare themselves inviolable. The court hoped for better results from military action, and an army of 30,000 men, in which foreign regiments had been carefully incorporated, was stationed around Paris and Versailles. The threat was perfectly plain, but the courage to strike a great blow was lacking. To this imprudent provocation another challenge was added in the exile of Necker, the popular minister (July 11). To this challenge the Assembly replied by renewing the oath, taken at the tennis court, that the representatives would not separate until they had given France a constitution. But Paris took alarm and flew to arms. Some of the populace marched against the troops, encamped in the Champs Elysées, who fell back upon Versailles. Others rushed to the Bastile, captured it and massacred its commandant. The provost of the merchants, the minister Foulon, and the intendant Berthier were also slain. The mob began to get a taste of blood (July 14, 1789).

The insensate conduct of the court, which called the Assembly together and then wished to get rid of it, which threatened but dared not act, which provoked yet knew neither how to intimidate nor to coerce, which cherished childish hatreds and had no resolution, in only two months had caused the reformation to deviate from its pacific methods. That fourteenth of July is explained by circumstances and by the state of men's minds. It was, nevertheless, the first of those revolutionary days, which were destined to demoralize the people by habituating them to regard the power and the law as a target against which they could always fire.

The Days of October. The Emigration. The Constitution of 1791. — "It is a riot," exclaimed Louis XVI when he heard the news of the Bastile. "No, Sire," replied the Duke de la Rochefoucauld, "it is a revolution." In fact on August 4 the Assembly abolished all feudal rights and the sale of offices. In September it voted the Declaration of Rights, established a single legislative chamber and rejected

the absolute veto power of the king. Then the court returned to the idea of employing force. It was proposed to the king that he should withdraw to Metz and place himself in Bouillé's army. That measure would have been the beginning of civil war. He remained at Versailles and summoned thither troops numerous enough to produce uneasiness, but too few to inspire any real fear.

Famine was ravaging France and in Paris men were dying of hunger. On October 5 an army of women set out for Versailles, imagining that abundance would reign if the king were brought back to Paris, his capital. National guards, recently organized by La Fayette, accompanied them and provoked quarrels in the courtyards of the palace with the body-guard. Many of the latter were killed, the queen was insulted and the royal dwelling was broken in upon. As a final confession of weakness, the king and the Assembly followed this crowd to Paris, where both were about to fall into the hands of the mob. The success of the expedition to Versailles showed the ringleaders of the faubourgs that thenceforth they could rule everything, Assembly or government, by intimidation.

Sanguinary scenes took place in the country districts also. The peasants were not satisfied by destroying feudal coats-of-arms and breaking down drawbridges and towers. They sometimes also killed the nobles. Terror reigned in the castles, as it reigned at court. Already the king's most prudent counsellors, his brother, the Count d'Artois, the princes of Condé and Conti, the dukes of Bourbon and Enghien, the Polignacs, and others of their class had fled, leaving him alone in the midst of a populace whose wrath they were about to inflame by every means and whose fiercest passions they were going to unloose by turning the arms of foreign nations against their country.

Nevertheless the Assembly nobly went on with its work. In the name of liberty it removed all unjust discriminations from the dissenting sects, the press and industry. In the name of justice it suppressed the right of primogeniture. In the name of equality it abolished nobility and titles, declared all Frenchmen of whatever religion eligible for public office, and replaced the ancient provincial boundaries by a division into ninety-three departments. Money poured out of the kingdom with the emigrants, or was above all concealed through the fear of a rising. The Assembly

ordered that 400,000,000 francs in assignats or paper money should be issued, secured by the property of the clergy, which it ordered to be sold. At the same time the law ceased to recognize monastic vows. The cloisters were declared to be open and the parliaments were replaced by elective tribunals. The sovereignty of the nation having been proclaimed, men drew the natural inference that all power ought to emanate from the people. Thus the elective system was introduced everywhere. A deliberative council in the departments, districts and communes was placed by the side of the elective council, as beside the king was placed the legislative body. And some people were already of the opinion that in such a system a hereditary king was an absurdity.

But the court did not accept the Constitution. Vanquished at Paris on July 14 and at Versailles on October 6, the nobles fled to Coblentz and there openly conspired against France. The nobles, who remained with the king, plotted in secret. Louis, who had never a will of his own, let them do what they liked. In public he accepted the decrees of the Assembly. In secret he protested against the violence done to his rights. Such a double game has always been productive of evil. Nevertheless, there was a moment when universal confidence reigned. This was at the Festival of the Federation, offered by the Parisians on the Champs de Mars to the deputies of the army and of the ninety-three departments. From November, 1789, to July, 1790, in the villages and in the cities, the inhabitants in arms fraternized with the men of the neighboring village or city, all uniting in the joy of their new-found country. These local federations made common cause and finally formed the great French federation which sent, on July 14, 1790, 100,000 representatives to Paris. The king in their presence solemnly swore fidelity to the Constitution.

But nothing came of this festival. Secret hostilities were immediately resumed between the court and the Assembly. The immediate cause of the trouble was the civil constitution of the clergy, which, by applying to the Church the reform introduced into the state, subjected even curates and bishops to election and disturbed the whole existing ecclesiastical hierarchy. This was an abuse of power on the part of the Assembly, for secular society was not competent to regulate the internal organization of religious

society. The Pope condemned this intervention of the state in the discipline of the Church and prohibited obedience to the new law. The king interposed his veto, which he removed only after a riot. But the great majority of the clergy refused to take the oath of allegiance to the civil constitution. Then schism entered into the Church of France. In its train were to come persecutions and a frightful war.

The king, to whose conscience this decree did violence just as violence had been done to his affections by the measures which the Assembly forced him to take against the emigrants, no longer felt himself free. He thought that he would find that liberty, denied him in the Tuileries, by taking refuge in the camp of Bouillé, whence he could summon Austria and Prussia to his aid. Arrested in his flight at Varennes (June 21, 1791), he was suspended from his functions by the Assembly. The people on July 17, in the Champs de Mars, demanded his abdication. Bailly ordered the red flag to be unfurled and the mob to be fired upon. On September 14, the king, who up to that time had been detained like a prisoner at the Tuileries, accepted the Constitution of 1791, which created a single assembly, charged with making the laws, and left to the monarch, together with the executive power, the right of suspending for four years the expressions of the national will by the use of his veto. The electoral body was divided into primary assemblies, which appointed the electors, and electoral assemblies which appointed the deputies. The former comprised the active citizens, that is to say, men twenty-five years of age, who were inscribed on the rolls of the national guard and paid a direct tax equal to three days' labor. The latter were formed by the proprietors or tenants of an estate, which brought in at least between 150 and 200 francs. All active citizens were eligible.

The National Assembly ended worthily with expressions of liberty and concord. It proclaimed universal amnesty, suppressed all obstacles to circulation and repealed all exceptional laws, hoping thereby to recall the emigrants to their country. Among its members the most distinguished were Mounier, Malouet, Barnave, the Lameths, Cazalès, Maury, Duport, Sieyès, and especially Mirabeau. The last named, had he lived, might perhaps have reconciled royalty with the Revolution. It is from Mirabeau

that we have the beautiful formula of the new era, "Right is the sovereign of the world."

The National Assembly prohibited the reëlection of its members to the new assembly. This was an unwise self-abnegation, for the Revolution needed that its veterans should hold its standard high and firm above the superstitious worshippers of the past and the fierce dreamers of the future. Thus the way might be paved for the peaceful triumph of that new state of mind and institutions which has so often been disturbed and compromised by the regrets of the former and the rashness of the latter. In spite of every mistake the National Assembly was the mother of French liberties. Its ideas have reappeared in all the French constitutions and are now fundamental in the French political state.