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INEFFECTUAL COALITION OF THE KINGS AGAINST THE
REVOLUTION

(1792-1802)

The Legislative Assembly (1791-1792).— This Assembly, so tame in comparison with its two great and terrible sisters, the National Assembly and the Convention, began its sessions on October 1, 1791, and ended them on September 21, 1792. Its leaders, the Girondists, Brissot, Pétion, Vergniaud, Gensonné, Ducos, Isnard and Valazé, labored to overthrow the monarchy, although leaving the extremists to initiate the Republic. In consequence the Republic was founded in blood which the Girondists might have founded in moderation.

Effect Outside France produced by the Revolution. The First Coalition (1791).— To the internal difficulties which the National Assembly had encountered, the embarrassment of foreign complications was added under the Legislative Assembly. The Revolution had awakened in foreign lands numerous echoes of its principles and hopes. In Belgium, in Italy, in Holland, all along the Rhine and in the heart of Germany, in England and even in distant Russia, it seemed a promise of deliverance. The French ambassador to the court of the Tsar wrote in his memoirs: "Although the Bastille certainly was not a menace to any one here, I cannot describe the enthusiasm which the fall of that state prison and the first tempestuous triumph of liberty excited among the merchants, the tradesmen, the burghers and some young men of higher rank. Frenchmen, Russians, Germans, Englishmen, Danes, Dutchmen, everybody in the streets, congratulated and embraced each other as though they had been delivered from a ponderous chain which pressed upon them."

The Swiss historian, von Müller, beheld in this victory the will of Providence. The philosophers and poets, Kant

and Fichte, Schiller and Goethe, then thought the same. The latter said, on the evening of Valmy: "In this place and on this day a new era for the world begins." Five years later he again recalled, in *Hermann and Dorothea*, "those days of sweet hope, when one felt his heart beat more freely in his breast, in the early rays of the new sun." Thus at first the nations sympathized with France, because they understood that for them also Mirabeau and his colleagues had drawn up at Versailles the new charter of society.

But the princes were all the more incensed against this Revolution which threatened not to confine itself, like the English revolution of 1688, to the country where it had broken out.

As early as January, 1791, the emperor of Germany haughtily demanded that the German princes who held possessions in Alsace, Lorraine and Franche-Comté should be secured in their feudal rights. The emigrants found every facility for collecting troops at Coblenz and Worms. The Count d'Artois kept up with the emperor, according to the king's own confession, negotiations which had culminated in a secret convention. The sovereigns of Austria, Prussia, Piedmont and Spain, and even the aristocratic rulers of Switzerland, bound themselves to place 100,000 men on the frontiers of the kingdom (May, 1791). This convention had determined the flight of the king (June 20). The National Assembly, moved by apprehension rather than certain knowledge, had replied by voting a levy of 300,000 national guards for the defence of the territory.

At that time, the various wars in which the Northern powers were engaged, the Swedes against the Russians, the Russians against the Ottomans, the Ottomans against the Austrians, the Austrians against the Belgians, were nearing their end. Prussia had recovered from the anxiety which all those armaments in her vicinity had excited. Austria finally put down the insurrection of the Belgians, though the hatred of foreign domination survived. The peace of Sistova with the Ottomans left the Austrian emperor free to act. He and the king of Prussia had an interview at Pilnitz, where a plan was drawn up for the invasion of France and the restoration of Louis XVI. The famous declaration of Pilnitz was made on August 27, 1791. The Legislative Assembly assumed a haughty tone with these monarchs. "If the

princes of Germany continue to favor the preparations directed against the French, the French will carry among them, not fire and sword, but liberty. It is for them to calculate what results may follow this awakening of the nations." Louis XVI transmitted to the Powers a request for the withdrawal of their troops from the French frontiers. They maintained "the legality of the league of the sovereigns, united for the security and the honor of their crowns." The king of Sweden, Gustavus III, offered to put himself at the head of a sort of royal crusade against the revolutionists.

Thus between the two principles the struggle which had arisen, first at Versailles and then at Paris, between the king and the Assembly, after the defeat of absolutism in France, was about to be continued on the frontier between France and Europe. The princes who, like the French kings, had seized absolute power, were unwilling to abandon it. They entered into a coalition "for the safety of their crowns" against the political reform which the States General had inaugurated and which they esteemed the common enemy. Thus they were about to enter upon that frightful war of twenty-three years' duration, which for them, except at the very end, was only one long series of disasters, but which excited passion as well as heroism, and covered France equally with blood and glory.

The Commune of Paris. The Days of June 20 and August 10, 1792. The Massacres of September.—The first decrees of the Assembly, after the declaration of Pillnitz, dealt a blow at the emigrants and the nonjuring priests who, by their refusal to take the civic oath, had become sources of trouble in La Vendée and Brittany. At first, the king was unwilling to approve those decrees. The declaration of war, which he made against Austria on April 20, 1792, was not sufficient to dissipate the fear of secret negotiations on the part of the court with the enemy. The rout of the French troops at the engagement of Quiévrain caused the cry of treason to be raised. The constitutional party, which was friendly to the king and had at first predominated in the Assembly, could not control the municipal council of Paris. A Girondist, Piéton, was appointed mayor in preference to La Fayette. From that time forth the most violent propositions against royalty originated at the city hall. They were repeated and still further exaggerated in the famous clubs of the

Jacobins and the Cordeliers. They thence spread among the people by the thousand voices of the press and especially by the journal of Marat, who was beginning his sanguinary dictatorship. The masses did not long resist such appeals, which seemed justified by the threats from abroad and by the inadequate measures taken for defence of the territory. On June 20 the Tuileries were invaded. The king, insulted to his face, was constrained to put on the red cap. In vain did La Fayette demand reparation for this violation of the royal dwelling. He himself was proscribed two months later and forced to quit his army and France. He had been the last hope of the constitutional party. His flight announced the triumph of the Republicans.

The Duke of Brunswick invaded France. His insolent manifesto (July 25), threatening death to every armed inhabitant who should be captured, and the declaration of the Assembly that the country was in danger, fanned still further the popular excitement. France responded to the patriotic appeal of Paris. But with cries of hatred for foreigners were mingled denunciations of the court, the secret ally of the enemy. On August 10 volunteers from Marseilles and Brittany, the people of the faubourgs and many companies of the national guard attacked the Tuileries and massacred its defenders. The king took refuge in the midst of the Assembly, which declared him suspended from his functions and imprisoned him and all the royal family in the Temple. Four thousand persons perished in the tumult.

As the constitution had been repudiated, a convention was summoned to draw up a new one. Before it assembled, and when by its approaching end the Legislative Assembly had finally lost its little remaining authority, a great crime startled France. The prisons of Paris were forced between the second and the fifth of September and 966 prisoners were butchered. Danton had uttered these sinister words: "We must terrify the royalists. Audacity! Audacity! and still more audacity!" A small body of assassins, supported by the Commune, had committed this crime, which the Assembly and the frightened burghers allowed to be perpetrated and which to the grief and shame of France was to be repeated.

Invasion of France. Defeat of the Prussians at Valmy, September 20, 1792.—However, hostilities had begun.

The moment had been well chosen by the Powers. All their wars in the North and the East were finished. England herself had just imposed peace upon Tippoo Sahib, and had acquired half his states. France was menaced on three sides: on the north by the Austrians; on the Moselle by the Prussians, and in the direction of the Alps by the king of Sardinia. The rawness of the troops and the mutual distrust between officers and soldiers in the army of the North, at first occasioned some disorders, which were speedily repaired by the capture of several cities. Savoy and Nice were conquered. The Prussians, who had entered Champagne, were defeated by Dumouriez at the important battle of Valmy and driven back upon the Rhine. Custine, assuming the offensive, seized Spire, Worms and Mayence, whose inhabitants regarded his soldiers rather as liberators than as enemies. The attention and forces of Prussia had been again directed towards Poland. She desired to finish her work of spoliation in that unhappy country rather than undertake the dangerous but chivalrous task of freeing the queen of France. The Austrians, more interested in the defence of a princess of their blood, inaugurated at Lille a savage war. Instead of attacking the defences, they bombarded the city and in six days burned 450 houses. Their cruelty was useless. They were forced to raise the siege, while, with the army of Valmy, Dumouriez won (November 6) the battle of Jemmapes, which placed the Netherlands in his power.

The Convention (1792-1795). Proclamation of the French Republic, September 21, 1792. Death of Louis XVI.—At its first sitting the Convention abolished royalty and proclaimed the Republic. On December 3 it decided that Louis XVI must be brought to trial. This decision was contrary to the Constitution, which declared the king inviolable and subject to no other penalty than deposition.

Louis was condemned in advance. The venerable Malesherbes solicited and obtained the honor of defending his former master. A young lawyer, Desèze, was the spokesman. "I seek in you judges," he said, "and I behold only accusers." He spoke the truth. The situation was desperate. England was threatening. The Austrians were about to make the greatest efforts and a coalition of all Europe was impending. "Let us throw them the head of a king as a challenge!" exclaimed Danton. Louis ascended

the scaffold on January 21, 1793. Men had believed that the fall of that royal head would create an impassable abyss between old France and new France. It was the monarchy rather than the individual which they beheaded. Carnot wept on signing the death-warrant of Louis. Thus the perverted doctrine of the common welfare added another crime to history. Again men had forgotten that the common weal springs from great hearts, not from the executioner.

The Reign of Terror.—At the news of the death of Louis XVI the still hesitating powers declared against France. All the French were threatened and civil war burst out in La Vendée and Brittany. The Constitution everywhere held its own. Carnot organized fourteen armies. A revolutionary tribunal was created which pronounced judgment without appeal and punished with death a word, a regret or even the mere name which a man bore (March 10, 1793). The desertion of Dumouriez, who forsook his army and escaped to the Austrian camp (April 4, 1793) increased the alarm and caused revolutionary measures to be multiplied. In order that none of those who were called traitors might escape, the convention abrogated the inviolability of its members. It even resigned a part of its prerogatives by creating in its bosom a Committee of Public Safety, which was invested with the executive power. In fact suspicion was rife everywhere. Robespierre firmly believed that the Girondists wished to dismember France and surrender it to foreigners. The Girondists thought that Marat, Robespierre and Danton wished to make the Duke of Orleans king, then to assassinate him and found a triumvirate from which Danton would expel his two colleagues and reign alone. Each with conviction attributed to his adversaries the most absurd plans. From distrust arose panic, that terrible counsellor, and the axe hung suspended above and striking upon all heads. This system is called The Terror.

The executioners were dominated by it as much as were the victims and were in consequence still more merciless.

The party of the Mountain, whose leaders were Marat, Danton and Robespierre, caused a formal accusation to be passed against thirty-one Girondists (June 2), many of whom had escaped and were rousing the departments to insurrection. Then Caen, Bordeaux, Lyons, Marseilles, and most

of the cities of the south declared against the Convention. Toulon with the whole Mediterranean fleet was delivered over to the English. Condé and Valenciennes fell into the hands of the enemy. Mayence, then occupied by French troops, capitulated. The enemy invaded both the northern and southern frontiers. At the same time the insurgents in La Vendée were everywhere victorious and another enemy, a frightful famine, was added to the general disorder.

The cause of the Revolution, defended by less than thirty departments, seemed lost. The Convention saved it by displaying a savage energy. Merlin drew up the law concerning suspected persons, which cast more than 300,000 persons into prison. Barrère declared in the name of the Committee of Public Safety: "The Republic is now only an immense besieged city. France must henceforth be only one vast camp. All ages are summoned by the fatherland to defend liberty. The young men will fight. The married men will forge arms. The women will make clothes and tents for the soldiers. The children will turn old linen into lint. The aged will have themselves carried to the public squares to excite courage." Twelve hundred thousand men were raised. Bordeaux and Lyons returned to their duty. Bonaparte, then an artillery captain, retook Toulon. The Vendéans were driven from the gates of Nantes, and Jourdan, who commanded the principal army, checked the allies.

All these achievements were not accomplished without terrible intestine commotions. The nobles and priests, proscribed as suspects, perished in crowds upon the scaffolds which were erected in all the towns. Carrier, Fréron, Collot-d'Herbois, Couthon, Fouché and Barras were merciless. The assassination of Marat by Charlotte Corday, who thought that by killing him she was killing the Terror (July 13), rendered it more implacable. Queen Marie Antoinette, her sister Madame Elizabeth, Bailly, the Girondist leaders, the Duke of Orleans, General Custine, Madame Roland, Lavoisier, Malsherbes and a thousand other illustrious heads fell. Then the party of the Mountain fell upon one another. Robespierre and Saint Just, supported by the powerful society of the Jacobins, first proscribed the hideous partisans of the anarchist Hébert and then Camille Desmoulins and Danton, who had suggested clemency.

The Ninth of Thermidor, or July 27, 1794. — Not yet could peace reign among the remnants of the Mountain. Robes-

pierre was threatening many of the fiercest leaders and several members of the Committee whose dictatorship he wished to destroy for his own advantage. Among them were Fouché, Tallien, Carrier, Billaud-Varennes, Collet-d'Herbois, Vadier and Amar. On the ninth of Thermidor these men succeeded in decreeing a formal act of accusation against Robespierre, Couthon, Saint Just and two other representatives, Lebas and the younger Robespierre, who demanded the right to share their fate. One hundred of Robespierre's followers perished with him. Two days earlier, this revolution would have saved the young and noble André Chénier.

Several of the men who had overthrown Robespierre had themselves been extreme partisans of the Terror. But such was the force of public opinion that they were compelled to represent themselves as favorable to moderation. Thus the fall of Robespierre became the signal for a reaction which, despite some frightful excesses, nevertheless allowed France to take breath. The guillotine ceased to be the means of government. Though the parties still continued for a long time to proscribe each other, the people at least no longer were afforded the hideous spectacle of thirty or forty heads every day falling under the knife.

Glorious Campaigns of 1793-1795. — After the death of Louis XVI the coalition of Austria, Prussia and Piedmont was joined by England, who readily improved the opportunity to deprive France of her commerce and her colonies. Spain and Naples through family reasons, Holland and Portugal through obedience to England, and the German Empire under the pressure of its two leading states, had also entered it. This was to declare almost universal war against France. Distance for a time prevented Russia from taking part. Denmark and Sweden resolutely maintained neutrality.

Fortunately for France, Austria and Prussia were mainly occupied by Polish affairs and the invading armies frittered their strength away in sieges. Instead of fighting for principles, each hostile country hoped to aggrandize itself at the expense of France. Thus the English wished to seize or destroy the French posts in Flanders. The Austrians desired the French fortresses on the Scheldt. The Prussians counted upon seizing Alsace and the Spaniards aimed at Roussillon. But while the allies wasted three months before Condé, Valenciennes and Mayence, and another month in preparation for the siege of Dunkirk, Le Quesnoy, Mau-