

CHAPTER LX.

THE LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY.

(1791-1792 A.D.)

The Legislative Assembly.—The Legislative Assembly began its sessions on October 1, 1791, and ended them on September 21, 1792. It formed a stage of transition from the limited monarchy of the Constitutionalists to the dictatorship of the Montagnards. Its leaders, the Girondists,¹ Brissot, Pétion, Vergniaud, Guadet, Gensonné, labored, indeed, for the overthrow of royalty, but left to the extreme parties the initiation of the republic.

The Non-juring Priests and the Émigrés.—Three great dangers threatened the Revolution,—the non-juring priests; the émigrés, who had made Brussels, Worms, and Coblenz centres of intrigues against the country; and the foreign powers, who openly expressed their intention to re-establish Louis XVI. in his rights, by the famous declaration of Pillnitz, signed by the king of Prussia and the emperor Leopold (August 27, 1791). The Legislative Assembly ordered that every non-juring priest should be deprived of his salary, and that the émigrés who did not return within a fixed time should be declared conspirators, and the revenues from their property should be collected for the benefit of the nation, “but without detriment to the claims of their wives, their children, or their lawful creditors.” Laws of proscription had begun.

Declaration to the Foreign Powers.—To the foreign powers the Assembly, while professing its preference for peace, declared “that if the princes of Germany continued to favor preparations directed against France, the French would carry into their lands not fire and sword, but liberty.

¹ The Girondists were so named because among them, and distinguished for their great eloquence, were the deputies from the department of the Gironde, Vergniaud, Guadet, and Gensonné. The fanatical republicans were called Montagnards because they were seated in the Assembly on the upper benches on the left side. The Feuillants, or constitutional royalists, were seated on the (presiding officer’s) right.

It was for them to estimate what would be the consequences of this awakening of the nations” (November 29, 1791). The king transmitted to the foreign powers requests to withdraw their troops from the French frontiers, but they persisted. Thus the kings formed a coalition against France, and began a frightful war of twenty-three years.

The Girondist Ministry (March, 1792).—At the approach of the war, Louis XVI. was obliged to call the Girondists to the ministry; Servan was made minister of war; Dumouriez, a very able but not wholly trustworthy man, minister of foreign affairs. The portfolio of the interior was bestowed upon the honest Roland, whose wife has won a place among famous names of the Revolution.

First Reverses; Events of June 20, 1792.—War was solemnly declared on April 20, 1792, by Louis XVI. against the emperor. Dumouriez wished to take the offensive. He counted upon an easy conquest of the Southern Netherlands, which had recently been in revolt against the house of Austria. But the beginning was unfortunate; for there was no confidence between the soldiers and the officers, the former continually suspecting the latter of treason. There was great consternation in Paris; the Assembly, declaring that the country was in danger, voted the establishment of a camp of twenty thousand men near the capital, and pronounced the penalty of transportation against the non-juring priests. The king refused to sanction this last measure, and dismissed the Girondist ministers. This moment was the last at which Louis could still have saved his crown by resolutely placing himself at the head of the Revolution. Far from doing this, he sent a secret agent in all haste to the coalitionists. This mission was not known, but the most violent attacks upon royalty were spread among the people by the thousand voices of the press, particularly by Marat’s journal. The populace did not long resist this appeal.

On the 20th of June, the populace, armed with pikes, advanced upon the Assembly, which made the mistake of opening its doors to them and allowing them to file before it, singing the famous *Ça ira*, with cries of *Vive la nation!* Thence this mob marched to the Tuileries, burst into the palace, and summoned Louis XVI. to sanction its decrees. The king allowed the *bonnet rouge* to be put upon his head. The populace, satisfied at this, retired. This fatal day

inaugurated the Reign of Terror. Soon after, La Fayette, who had commanded one of the armies on the frontier, was proscribed and forced to leave France. His flight announced the triumph of the republicans.

Manifesto of the Duke of Brunswick; Events of August 10, 1792. — Meanwhile all France was in commotion; the federates of the departments were hastening up to form the camp near Paris. The leaders of the Cordeliers and the Jacobins, Danton, Marat, and Robespierre, took advantage of their presence to make a final attack on royalty. Another imprudence on the part of the allies was of service to these leaders at this juncture. On the 26th of July, 1792, the Duke of Brunswick, general of the Prussian army, had published a manifesto announcing that he was coming, in the name of the kings, to restore Louis XVI. to power, and violently threatened all who opposed him. The challenge was accepted; the mob (August 9) demanded the deposition of the king, and the next morning, well armed, with several sections of the National Guard, surrounded the Tuileries. The king, protected by his Swiss, and by some of the nobles and National Guards, could have defended himself; but the National Guards passed over to the side of the people, and the king decided to take refuge in the midst of the Assembly. He succeeded in reaching it with his whole family, but not without great peril: refuge was given him in the reporters' gallery. Meanwhile contradictory orders paralyzed the enthusiasm of the Swiss and of the nobles, who remained in the château, which after a short and bloody fight was entered and sacked. Its defenders were murdered in the apartments, in the gardens, in the neighboring streets; two thousand persons perished. The victors marched in triumph into the hall of the Assembly, dictating to it two orders, — the deposition of the king, and the convocation of a national convention. It obeyed the second; as for the first, it contented itself with suspending the executive power. The mob had scored another victory.

Louis XVI. left the Assembly only to be led to prison in the Temple. An unscrupulous faction, that of the Commune of Paris, became master, with Danton, then minister of justice, at its head.

Massacres of September, 1792. — The Prussians had just taken Longwy; the report spread that they were in Verdun. Consternation was general. But Danton believed that before

going forth to conquer foreign enemies it was necessary to exterminate those at home, at least to "strike terror to the royalists." He ordered, or allowed the committee of surveillance to order, the frightful massacres of September 2-6. A band of four or five hundred assassins, hired by the Commune, took possession of the prisons. Some of them constituted themselves a tribunal, others served as executioners. The prisoners were called, and after a few questions they were set at liberty or led into the courtyard of the prison and despatched with sabres, pikes, axes, and clubs. After having killed the political prisoners, they murdered prisoners of all classes. The number of killed amounted to nine hundred and sixty-six. The Assembly, terrified and powerless, had made no opposition.

Victory of Valmy (September 20, 1792). — One hundred and sixty thousand Prussians and Imperialists had set out from Coblenz in July. To oppose them, France had only ninety-six thousand men, without discipline, without confidence in themselves or in their commanders, and who would not have been able to prevent the enemy from reaching Paris itself, if the enemy had been skilful and the march prompt. On the 22d of August the allies had only reached Longwy, which was taken; Verdun opened its gates. Brunswick slowly extended his line behind the Meuse; Dumouriez had time to come up, occupied the defiles of the Argonne, and formed in the rear three intrenched camps, into which he received the soldiers who came from every direction.

In spite of the Prussian advance, Dumouriez persisted in remaining in the Argonne, intending to establish himself in the rear of the Prussians. The latter made a halt, in order to attack him. The principal struggle was for the possession of the hill of Valmy, where Kellermann had posted himself with his raw conscripts, who stood the fire with a steadiness which surprised the enemy. The action was little but a cannonade of several hours, ending with a spirited repulse of the Prussian charge, by Kellermann's conscripts (September 20).

The day after the battle of Valmy, the Convention assembled and proclaimed the republic. Its first reply to the negotiations proposed by Brunswick was worthy of the old Roman Senate: "The French Republic can listen to no proposition until the Prussian troops have entirely evacuated the French territory." The Prussians, decimated by

hunger and sickness, began their evacuation of France on October 1.

Defence of Lille; Victory of Jemmapes. — While Dumouriez arrested at Valmy the invading army, and slowly followed up its retreat, Custine had taken the offensive on the Rhine, captured Speyer, Worms, and even Mainz. In the Alps, Montesquiou conquered Savoy, and Anselme the county of Nice. In the Netherlands the Austrians had attacked Lille with savage barbarity, but could not overcome the stanch bravery of that patriotic city. Dumouriez arrived with the army of Valmy. On the 6th of November he won the battle of Jemmapes, which gave France the Austrian Netherlands. On the 13th he entered Brussels.

Thus, in the first campaign, the new France, training her young soldiers under fire, repulsed the attack of kings, and laid her hand upon those half-French countries which Louis XIV. himself had not been able to secure. Goethe, who was present with the Prussian army at Valmy, as a spectator, declared that evening that then and there a new epoch in the history of the world began.

CHAPTER LXI.

THE CONVENTION.

(1792-1795 A.D.)

National Convention. — Royalty had succumbed. The Convention's first act was to proclaim the republic. But the conquerors were divided; two great parties contended for the direction of the Assembly, — the Girondists, who had had the predominance in the Legislative Assembly, and who retained it some months longer in the Convention; and the Montagnards, who were later to rule over it. The first was superior in eloquence and learning, the second had more passion and boldness. Nourished upon the ideas of Jean Jacques Rousseau, they dreamed of a millennium of public virtue for France; even though society perished under the experiment, they wished to apply their theories. Between the Girondists and the Montagnards was the Plain, composed of moderate and feeble men, who were powerless against the momentum of the majority.

Death of Louis XVI. (January 21, 1793). — After the affair of the 10th of August, the royal family had been shut up in the Temple. All communication with those outside had been forbidden. They lived thus for five months in the Temple under a surveillance always strict and often insulting. Louis XVI., formed rather for private life than for the throne, showed during his captivity a calm dignity and virtue which often touched the most brutal jailers.

The constitution declared the king inviolable and authorized no penalty against him but deposition, which had been already pronounced. But the situation was extreme, a coalition of all Europe was imminent, and the Convention, constituting itself both accuser and judge, ordered the king to appear before it (December 3). The venerable Malesherbes, crowning a beautiful life by a noble act, demanded and obtained the honor of defending his old master. Saint-Just and Robespierre did not trouble themselves as to whether the accusations against the king were true or false;