

## JEAN PAUL MARAT

**J**EAN PAUL MARAT, French revolutionist of the violent type, characteristic of a wild and lunatic time, was born at Boudry, Switzerland, May 24, 1744, and assassinated at Paris, by the ill-fated Charlotte Corday, that heroine being filled with horror at the excesses of the Reign of Terror. Not much is definitely known of his early career, save that he spent some years in travel and studied physical science and medicine, settling for a time in London, England, where he seems to have had a considerable practice as a physician. Here, or rather at Edinburgh, Scotland, he published among other meritorious scientific works, "The Chains of Slavery" (1774), of which a French translation, "Les Chaines de l'Esclavage," appeared at Paris about eighteen years later. Returning to France, he established himself in his profession and entered the service of the Count of Artois, afterwards Charles X, and became eminent as a doctor at Court and known for his attainments as a scientist. In 1786, he however abandoned his profession and took to politics after a reckless and fanatical fashion. His hatred of the social and political irregularities of the period blinded his better nature and transformed him into the most violent of radicals. In 1789, when the first French Revolution had broken out, his relentless class-hatred drew to him the worst elements in the capital, which he further inflamed by his journal, "L' Ami du Peuple," inciting the populace to frenzy and to the committal of the most extreme excesses. The virulence of his attacks on the government and his suspicion alike of Royalist and Girondist were so extreme that for a time he had to seek refuge in England, and on his return to Paris concealment in the cellars and sewers of the capital. Here his ferocity led, in great measure, to the massacres of September, 1792, and gained him election as a member of the National Convention, in spite of his ultra-revolutionary violence and its rejection of some of his outrageous proposals. By the Girondists he was brought to trial before the Revolutionary Tribunal, but was acquitted (April 24, 1793), and a little later that party in the State was overthrown by the combined efforts of Robespierre, Danton, and Marat. A few weeks after the fall of the Girondists, he was interviewed on some pretext by a young woman of Caen, Charlotte Corday, who, though she had embraced the principles of the Revolution, stood aghast at the acts of the Terrorists of the time. Gaining admission to his chamber, she stabbed Marat to death in his bath, which he had sought to relieve himself of the discomforts of the skin disease contracted while in hiding in the Paris sewers, and from which he was at the time dying. The heroine, for this patriot act, was after trial sent to the Guillotine. Though honor was at the era paid to Marat's remains and regret expressed at the manner of his death, revulsion ere long ensued in the public mind, and his name was mentioned only with execration and loathing.

### SPEECH BEFORE THE NATIONAL CONVENTION

**G**ENTLEMEN,—I have in this assembly a great number of personal enemies—[here three-fourths of the assemblage rose, crying out, "We all are, yes, all of us!"]—I have in this assembly [continued Marat coolly] a great number of personal enemies; I would recall them to a

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sense of decency; it is not by clamor, by threats, by insult that his guilt is proven to an accused man; it is not by raising a hue and cry over a defender of the people that his criminality is demonstrated to him.

I am grateful to the unseen hand which has cast among you a phantasm to affright timid souls, to cause dissension among good citizens, and to bring into disfavor the deputation of Paris. I thank my persecutors for having furnished me with the opportunity to lay bare my soul before you.

Certain members of the deputation are accused of aspiring to the dictatorship, to the tribunate, to the triumvirate: this absurd charge would find no supporters did I not form a part of the deputation. Very well, gentlemen, I owe it in justice to state that my colleagues, notably Danton and Robespierre, have constantly rejected all ideas of a dictatorship, of a tribunate, and of a triumvirate, whenever I have broached them; I have even had to break divers lances with them on this subject.

I believe myself to be the first political writer, and perhaps the only one in France since the Revolution, who has proposed a dictator, a military tribune, or triumvirate as the only means of crushing out traitors and conspirators! If this opinion be reprehensible, I alone am culpable; if it be criminal, it is on my head alone that I call down the vengeance of the nation. I offer myself then as a self-dedicated victim, but before condemning, deign to listen to me.

My opinions are recorded in articles bearing my signature, printed and publicly distributed for nearly three years, and not until to-day has the attempt been made to metamorphose them into the crime of high treason! What then, opinions publicly proclaimed and submitted to the scrutiny of readers, shall they be regarded as crimes? No, surely, were they



false they would be no more than simple errors; were they extravagant their author would be considered blind or stupid. It is in darkness that traitors are hidden and that plots are formed, but never does a conspirator declare his plans upon the house-tops.

I have submitted my opinions to the examination of the public; if they are dangerous it is in combating them by substantial reasons, and not in dedicating me to execration, that my enemies should condemn them — it is in refuting them, and not in raising over my head the sword of tyranny, that their baleful influence should be counteracted.

After all, gentlemen, with what do you reproach me? When the ever-recurring treacheries of a perfidious court and of its minions, when the ceaseless plottings of the enemies of the Revolution, when the sanguinary schemes of the agents of despotism, threatened to crush out liberty; when the unfaithful representatives of the people, the iniquitous guardians of authority, the unworthy ministers of the law conspiring with an infamous prince, led the country to the verge of ruin; when legislators who had been bought prostituted their august office to the making of tyrannical laws, grinding down the people that they might destroy them; when public functionaries occupied themselves solely in showing favor to traitors; when magistrates protected with the sacred ægis of justice the enemies of the State, while they slew with the sword of tyranny the friends of the country, the defenders of liberty; when by the united efforts of these scoundrels the country was going to ruin,—which of you, gentlemen, had dared to call me guilty of crime if in the transports of my despair I had called down on guilty heads the axe of popular vengeance? Which of you will dare call me guilty of crime to have recommended the only means left us for

the public safety? The people, without obeying my voice, have had the good sense to realize that therein lay their sole resource, and have employed it at various times to prevent their own destruction. The bloody scenes of the 14th of July, the 6th of October, the 10th of August, and the 2d of September have saved France; why were they not directed by able hands!

Fearing myself these terrible acts of an unrestrained multitude; distressed at seeing the axe fall indiscriminately upon all culprits, confounding petty delinquents with great criminals; desiring to direct it alone against the heads of the principal anti-revolutionists, I have endeavored to bring these movements, so horrible and full of disorder, into subjection to the wisdom of a leader who should be at the same time a patriot of integrity and a statesman who would seek out and put to death the principal conspirators in order to cut by a single stroke the thread of all machinations, to prevent the shedding of blood, to restore peace and cement liberty. Follow my writings; it is with this end in view I have demanded that the people should select a dictator, a military tribune.

To prevent the abuses and the dangers of such a mission I have recommended that the power to inflict capital punishment should be so restricted as to include none save the leaders of conspiracies, that the duration of its exercise be limited to some few days, and that the citizen adjudged worthy to fill the position should be chained by the foot to a cannon-ball in order that he himself should be at each instant within the grasp of the people in case he should forget his duties.

If this salutary measure had been employed immediately after the taking of the Bastille how many disasters would have been prevented! If at that time five hundred traitor heads had fallen, a hundred thousand patriots would not have been



brought to destruction; a hundred thousand patriots would not have been menaced with it; the state would not have been for so long a time rent by factions, convulsed by seditions, given over to disorder, to anarchy, to poverty, to famine, and to civil war; it would not have been in danger of becoming the prey of the inhuman hordes of despots leagued together against us.

All thinkers, gentlemen, feel the justice of this measure; if upon this point you have not yet risen to my height, so much the worse for you; rivers of blood will one day convince you of your error, and you will deplore with bitterness of spirit your fatal self-confidence.

Will you permit me to speak one word of myself! Some have had the audacity to accuse me of having ambitious designs! I will not stoop to deny this ridiculous accusation! Let those still tempted to make it cast a glance over my political career. If I had been willing to put a price upon my silence I should have been glutted with gold — and I am poor. I have never asked either payment or employment; to better serve my country I have braved poverty, danger, and suffering; I have been, each day, pursued by legions of assassins; for three years I have condemned myself to a secret life, and I have maintained the cause of liberty as with head on the block. Speak, cowardly calumniators, is that the conduct of an ambitious man?

Let us cease, gentlemen, to consume precious time in vain altercations and in scandalous wranglings! Let us fear to give consistency to the absurd rumors adroitly disseminated by the enemies of our country with the view of retarding the great work of the constitution and in order to put them to a hard test. Suffer me to urge you to sanction the declaration of rights, to lay the sacred foundations of a government just

and free which shall shape the destiny of France, cement the liberty, and assure the happiness of the people, for whom I am ready at any instant to give my life.

[The tempest that was muttering over the deputation of Paris, and threatened especially the Friend of the People, appeared to be dissipated under the irresistible force of his patriotism; all were speechless; the patriots exchanged glances and appeared to reproach each other with their illogical action; Danton and Robespierre were not able to dissimulate their chagrin at their impolitic and culpable desertion. On their side the Girondists, who had not breathed a word during the discourse, but had watched the conduct of their adversaries, felt that the patriots were united to Marat by only a slender tie. It must be broken, they said among themselves, it must be broken at all hazards — and Vergniaud appeared upon the tribune. “If any misfortune can befall a representative of the people, I feel it to be mine in being obliged to follow upon this tribune a man resting under indictments from which he has not cleared himself.” (A murmur of disapprobation told Vergniaud of his lack of tact.) “I glory in it,” responded Marat, and the leader of the Girondists was completely crushed by this audacious reply, as sudden as unexpected. Then Boileau, who had witnessed the ignominious defeat of his colleague, presented himself to retrieve the blunder of the former. He mounted the tribune with a copy of the “Friend of the People” in hand, the date of which he carefully concealed, and declaimed its contents: “I demand,” he added, “that this monster should be indicted.” At this sanguinary motion it became a question among the Anti-revolutionists as to who should exceed Boileau in his expressions.

The tempest had appeared to subside for a moment, but only to burst forth with greater fury upon the head of Marat. Witness his defence:]

I am charged, as by a term of reproach, with the indictments brought against me by the upholders of despotism, with arraignments brought forward at this tribunal by the



representatives of the people prostituted by the court; these are the brevets of honor of which I am proud; to those who are not able to appreciate them I say that the people, in calling me hither to defend their rights, have annulled these arbitrary decrees, have judged my cause, and have declared me guiltless. I am accused of being false, of being a traitor and a plotter, by one who has Number 685 of the "Friend of the People" in hand, and who adduces in proof of his assertion its last article mendaciously altered.

You have been told that I wished to overturn the State, to plunge it into trouble and disorder by causing it to destroy the National Convention. This false statement can have no other end than to mislead the Convention and to rouse its indignation against me. Who are the authors of this atrocious plot? They are evil men whom I have for a long time denounced as the worst enemies of the country, the members of the Brissot faction; see them there before me, they sneer at this very instant at the noise made by the furious cries of their followers who dare to look me in the face.

My accuser has produced against me a number of the "Friend of the People" printed upon the placard addressed to Pétion some ten days ago. Although this article was but the simple expression of my fears, it is also true that my opinion of the composition of the Assembly was formed only after the alarming nomination of a great number of untrustworthy deputies of both legislatures, for the Assembly was not then organized. You see, gentlemen, the opinion I have of it to-day after having seen its workings; it is contained in the new journal which I have just issued under the title of "Journal of the French Republic."

[The reading of the aforesaid number sufficed completely to allay the terrible apprehensions that the accusers of Marat

had succeeded in arousing in the entire assembly. Marat resumed in these words:]

Permit me, gentlemen, to recall you to yourselves after the access of rage against me to which you have abandoned yourselves. What, if by the negligence of my printer my journal had not appeared to-day, you would then have delivered me to the sword of tyranny! No indeed! I should not have perished like a coward; doubt not that if the fatal decree had gone forth I should have escaped from the wrath of my persecutors by blowing out my brains before your eyes. [Here he placed a pistol to his forehead.]

The indictment of him who should propose a dictatorship, a tribunate, or triumvirate has been demanded of you; it is a false step which you are thus urged to take; this expedient for the public welfare depends finally upon the people themselves. If it is ever judged necessary by them they will take it despite your decrees, as they have adopted methods more terrible despite the decrees of the National Assembly, and you will have compromised your authority needlessly and without result.

[Special translation by Mary E. Adams.]