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Robespierre

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ESSAY 1: ROBESPIERRE ***

CRITICAL MISCELLANIES

BY

JOHN MORLEY

VOL. I. Essay 1: Robespierre

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ROBESPIERRE.

I.

A French writer has recently published a careful and interesting volume on the famous events which ended in the overthrow of Robespierre and the close of the Reign of Terror.^[1] These events are known in the historic calendar as the Revolution of Thermidor in the Year II. After the fall of the monarchy, the Convention decided that the year should begin with the autumnal equinox, and that the enumeration should date from the birth of the Republic. The Year I. opens on September 22, 1792; the Year II. opens on the same day of 1793. The month of Thermidor begins on July 19. The memorable Ninth Thermidor therefore corresponds to July 27, 1794. This has commonly been taken as the date of the commencement of a counter-revolution, and in one sense it was so. Comte, however, and others have preferred to fix the reaction at the execution of Danton (April 5, 1794), or Robespierre's official proclamation of Deism in the Festival of the Supreme Being (May 7, 1794).

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[1] *La Révolution de Thermidor*. Par Ch. D'Héricault. Paris: Didier, 1876.

M. D'Héricault does not belong to the school of writers who treat the course of history as a great high road, following a firmly traced line, and set with plain and ineffaceable landmarks. The French Revolution has nearly always been handled in this way, alike by those who think it fruitful in blessings, and by their adversaries, who pronounce it a curse inflicted by the wrath of Heaven. Historians have looked at the Revolution as a plain landsman looks at the sea. To the landsman the ocean seems one huge immeasurable flood, obeying a simple law of ebb and flow, and offering to the navigator a single uniform force. Yet in truth we know that the oceanic movement is the product of many forces; the seeming uniformity covers the energy of a hundred currents

and counter-currents; the sea-floor is not even nor the same, but is subject to untold conditions of elevation and subsidence; the sea is not one mass, but many masses moving along definite lines of their own. It is the same with the great tides of history. Wise men shrink from summing them up in single propositions. That the French Revolution led to an immense augmentation of happiness, both for the French and for mankind, can only be denied by the Pope. That it secured its beneficent results untempered by any mixture of evil, can only be maintained by men as mad as Doctor Pangloss. The Greek poetess Corinna said to the youthful Pindar, when he had interwoven all the gods and goddesses in the Theban mythology into a single hymn, that we should sow with the hand and not with the sack. Corinna's monition to the singer is proper to the interpreter of historical truth: he should cull with the hand, and not sweep in with the scythe. It is doubtless mere pedantry to abstain from the widest conception of the sum of a great movement. A clear, definite, and stable idea of the meaning in the history of human progress of such vast groups of events as the Reformation or the Revolution, is indispensable for any one to whom history is a serious study of society. It is just as important, however, not to forget that they were really groups of events, and not in either case a single uniform movement. The World-Epos is after all only a file of the morning paper in a state of glorification. A sensible man learns, in everyday life, to abstain from praising and blaming character by wholesale; he becomes content to say of this trait that it is good, and of that act that it was bad. So in history, we become unwilling to join or to admire those who insist upon transferring their sentiment upon the whole to their judgment upon each part. We seek to be allowed to retain a decided opinion as to the final value to mankind of a long series of transactions, and yet not to commit ourselves to set the same estimate on each transaction in particular, still less on each person associated with it. Why shall we not prize the general results of the Reformation, without being obliged to defend John of Leyden and the Munster Anabaptists?

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M. D'Héricault's volume naturally suggests such reflections as these. Of all the men of the Revolution, Robespierre has suffered most from the audacious idolatry of some writers, and the splenetic impatience of others. M. Louis Blanc and M. Ernest Hamel talk of him as an angel or a prophet, and the Ninth Thermidor is a red day indeed in their martyrology. Michelet and M. D'Héricault treat him as a mixture of Cagliostro and Caligula, both a charlatan and a miscreant. We are reminded of the commencement of an address of the French Senate to the first Bonaparte: 'Sire,' they began, 'the desire for perfection is one of the worst maladies that can afflict the human mind.' This bold aphorism touches one of the roots of the judgments we pass both upon men and events. It is because people so irrationally think fit to insist upon perfection, that Robespierre's admirers would fain deny that he ever had a fault, and the tacit adoption of the same impracticable standard makes it easier for Robespierre's wholesale detractors to deny that he had a single virtue or performed a single service. The point of view is essentially unfit for history. The real subject of history is the improvement of social arrangements, and no conspicuous actor in public affairs since the world began saw the true direction of improvement with an absolutely unerring eye from the beginning of his career to the end. It is folly for the historian, as it is for the statesman, to strain after the imaginative unity of the dramatic creator. Social progress is an affair of many small pieces and slow accretions, and the interest of historic study lies in tracing, amid the immense turmoil of events and through the confusion of voices, the devious course of the sacred torch, as it shifts from bearer to bearer. And it is not the bearers who are most interesting, but the torch.

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In the old Flemish town of Arras, known in the diplomatic history of the fifteenth century by a couple of important treaties, and famous in the industrial history of the Middle Ages for its pre-eminence in the manufacture of the most splendid kind of tapestry hangings, Maximilian Robespierre was born in May 1758. He was therefore no more than five and thirty years old when he came to his ghastly end in 1794. His father was a lawyer, and, though the surname of the family had the prefix of nobility, they belonged to the middle class. When this decorative prefix became dangerous, Maximilian Derobespierre dropped it. His great rival, Danton, was less prudent or less fortunate, and one of the charges made against him was that he had styled himself Monsieur D'Anton.

Robespierre's youth was embittered by sharp misfortune. His mother died when he was only seven years old, and his father had so little courage under the blow that he threw up his practice, deserted his children, and died in purposeless wanderings through Germany. The burden that the weak and selfish throw down, must be taken up by the brave. Friendly kinsfolk charged themselves with the maintenance of the four orphans. Maximilian was sent to the school of the town, whence he proceeded with a sizarship to the college of Louis-le-Grand in Paris. He was an apt and studious pupil, but austere, and disposed to that sombre cast of spirits which is common enough where a lad of some sensibility and much self-esteem finds himself stamped with a badge of social inferiority. Robespierre's worshippers love to dwell on his fondness for birds: with the universal passion of mankind for legends of the saints, they tell how the untimely death of a favourite pigeon afflicted him with anguish so poignant, that, even sixty long years after, it made his sister's heart ache to look back upon the pain of that tragic moment. Always a sentimentalist, Robespierre was from boyhood a devout enthusiast for the great high priest of the sentimental tribe. Rousseau was then passing the last squalid days of his life among the meadows and woods at Ermenonville. Robespierre, who could not have been more than twenty at the time, for Rousseau died in the summer of 1778, is said to have gone on a reverential pilgrimage in search of an oracle from the lonely sage, as Boswell and as Gibbon and a hundred others had gone

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before him. Rousseau was wont to use his real adorers as ill as he used his imaginary enemies. Robespierre may well have shared the discouragement of the enthusiastic father who informed Rousseau that he was about to bring up his son on the principles of *Emilius*. 'Then so much the worse,' cried the perverse philosopher, 'both for you and your son.' If he had been endowed with second sight, he would have thought at least as rude a presage due to this last and most ill-starred of a whole generation of neophytes.

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In 1781 Robespierre returned to Arras, and amid the welcome of his relatives and the good hopes of friends began the practice of an advocate. For eight years he led an active and seemly life. He was not wholly pure from that indiscretion of the young appetite, about which the world is mute, but whose better ordering and governance would give a diviner brightness to the earth. Still, if he did not escape the ordeal of youth, Robespierre was frugal, laborious, and persevering. His domestic amiability made him the delight of his sister, and his zealous self-sacrifice for the education and advancement in life of his younger brother was afterwards repaid by Augustin Robespierre's devotion through all the fierce and horrible hours of Thermidor. Though cold in temperament, extremely reserved in manners, and fond of industrious seclusion, Robespierre did not disdain the social diversions of the town. He was a member of a reunion of Rosati, who sang madrigals and admired one another's bad verses. Those who love the ironical surprises of fate, may picture the young man who was doomed to play so terrible a part in terrible affairs, going through the harmless follies of a ceremonial reception by the Rosati, taking three deep breaths over a rose, solemnly fastening the emblem to his coat, emptying a glass of rose-red wine at a draught to the good health of the company, and finally reciting couplets that Voltaire would have found almost as detestable as the Law of Prairial or the Festival of the Supreme Being. More laudable efforts of ambition were prize essays, in which Robespierre has the merit of taking the right side in important questions. He protested against the inhumanity of laws that inflicted civil infamy upon the innocent family of a convicted criminal. And he protested against the still more horrid cruelty which reduced unfortunate children born out of wedlock to something like the status of the mediæval serf. Robespierre's compositions at this time do not rise above the ordinary level of declaiming mediocrity, but they promised a manhood of benignity and enlightenment. To compose prize essays on political reforms was better than to ignore or to oppose political reform. But the course of events afterwards owed their least desirable bias to the fact that such compositions were the nearest approach to political training that so many of the revolutionary leaders underwent. One is inclined to apply to practical politics Arthur Young's sensible remark about the endeavour of the French to improve the quality of their wool: 'A cultivator at the head of a sheep-farm of 3000 or 4000 acres, would in a few years do more for their wools than all the academicians and philosophers will effect in ten centuries.'

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In his profession he distinguished himself in one or two causes of local celebrity. An innovating citizen had been ordered by the authorities to remove a lightning-conductor from his house within three days, as being a mischievous practical paradox, as well as a danger and an annoyance to his neighbours. Robespierre pleaded the innovator's case on appeal, and won it. He defended a poor woman who had been wrongfully accused by a monk belonging to the powerful corporation of a great neighbouring abbey. The young advocate did not even shrink from manfully arguing a case against the august Bishop of Arras himself. His independence did him no harm. The Bishop afterwards appointed him to the post of judge or legal assessor in the episcopal court. This tribunal was a remnant of what had once been the sovereign authority and jurisdiction of the Bishops of Arras. That a court with the power of life and death should thus exist by the side of a proper corporation of civil magistrates, is an illustration of the inextricable labyrinth of the French law and its administration on the eve of the Revolution. Robespierre did not hold his office long. Every one has heard the striking story, how the young judge, whose name was within half a dozen years to take a place in the popular mind of France and of Europe with the bloodiest monsters of myth or history, resigned his post in a fit of remorse after condemning a murderer to be executed. 'He is a criminal, no doubt,' Robespierre kept groaning in reply to the consolations of his sister, for women are more positive creatures than men: 'a criminal, no doubt; but to put a man to death!' Many a man thus begins the great voyage with queasy sensibilities, and ends it a cannibal.

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Among Robespierre's associates in the festive mummeries of the Rosati was a young officer of Engineers, who was destined to be his colleague in the dread Committee of Public Safety, and to leave an important name in French history. In the garrison of Arras, Carnot was quartered,—that iron head, whose genius for the administrative organisation of war achieved even greater things for the new republic than the genius of Louvois had achieved for the old monarchy. Carnot surpassed not only Louvois, but perhaps all other names save one in modern military history, by uniting to the most powerful gifts for organisation, both the strategic talent that planned the momentous campaign of 1794, and the splendid personal energy and skill that prolonged the defence of Antwerp against the allied army in 1814 Partisans dream of the unrivalled future of peace, glory, and freedom that would have fallen to the lot of France, if only the gods had brought about a hearty union between the military genius of Carnot and the political genius of Robespierre. So, no doubt, after the restoration of Charles II. in England, there were good men who thought that all would have gone very differently, if only the genius of the great creator of the Ironsides had taken counsel with the genius of Venner, the Fifth-Monarchy Man, and Feak, the Anabaptist prophet.

The time was now come when such men as Robespierre were to be tried with fire, when they were to drink the cup of fury and the dregs of the cup of trembling. Sybils and prophets have already spoken their inexorable decree, as Goethe has said, on the day that first gives the man to

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the world; no time and no might can break the stamped mould of his character; only as life wears on, do all its aforeshapen lines come into light. He is launched into a sea of external conditions, that are as independent of his own will as the temperament with which he confronts them. It is action that tries, and variation of circumstance. The leaden chains of use bind many an ugly unsuspected prisoner in the soul; and when the habit of their lives has been sundered, the most immaculate are capable of antics beyond prevision. A great crisis of the world was prepared for Robespierre and those others, his allies or his destroyers, who with him came like the lightning and went like the wind.

At the end of 1788 the King of France found himself forced to summon the States-General. It was their first assembly since 1614. On the memorable Fourth of May, 1789, Robespierre appeared at Versailles as one of the representatives of the third estate of his native province of Artois. The excitement and enthusiasm of the elections to this renowned assembly, the immense demands and boundless expectations that they disclosed, would have warned a cool observer of events, if in that heated air a cool observer could have been found, that the hour had struck for the fulfilment of those grim apprehensions of revolution that had risen in the minds of many shrewd men, good and bad, in the course of the previous half century. No great event in history ever comes wholly unforeseen. The antecedent causes are so wide-reaching, many, and continuous, that their direction is always sure to strike the eye of one or more observers in all its significance. Lewis the Fifteenth, whose invincible weariness and heavy disgust veiled a penetrating discernment, measured accurately the scope of the conflict between the crown and the parlements: but, said he, things as they are will last my time. Under the roof of his own palace at Versailles, in the apartment of Madame de Pompadour's famous physician, one of Quesnai's economic disciples had cried out, 'The realm is in a sore way; it will never be cured without a great internal commotion; but woe to those who have to do with it; into such work the French go with no slack hand.' Rousseau, in a passage in the Confessions, not only divines a speedy convulsion, but with striking practical sagacity enumerates the political and social causes that were unavoidably drawing France to the edge of the abyss. Lord Chesterfield, so different a man from Rousseau, declared as early as 1752, that he saw in France every symptom that history had taught him to regard as the forerunner of deep change; before the end of the century, so his prediction ran, both the trade of king and the trade of priest in France would be shorn of half their glory. D'Argenson in the same year declared a revolution inevitable, and with a curious precision of anticipation assured himself that if once the necessity arose of convoking the States-General, they would not assemble in vain: *qu'on y prenne, garde! ils seraient fort sérieux!* Oliver Goldsmith, idly wandering through France, towards 1755, discerned in the mutinous attitude of the judicial corporations, that the genius of freedom was entering the kingdom in disguise, and that a succession of three weak monarchs would end in the emancipation of the people of France. The most touching of all these presentiments is to be found in a private letter of the great Empress, the mother of Marie Antoinette herself. Maria Theresa describes the ruined state of the French monarchy, and only prays that if it be doomed to ruin still more utter, at least the blame may not fall upon her daughter. The Empress had not learnt that when the giants of social force are advancing from the sombre shadow of the past, with the thunder and the hurricane in their hands, our poor prayers are of no more avail than the unbodied visions of a dream.

The old popular assembly of the realm was not resorted to before every means of dispensing with so drastic a remedy had been tried. Historians sometimes write as if Turgot were the only able and reforming minister of the century. God forbid that we should put any other minister on a level with that high and beneficent figure. But Turgot was not the first statesman, both able and patriotic, who had been disgraced for want of compliance with the conditions of success at court; he was only the last of a series. Chauvelin, a man of vigour and capacity, was dismissed with ignominy in 1736. Machault, a reformer, at once courageous and wise, shared the same fate twenty years later; and in his case revolution was as cruel and as heedless as reaction, for, at the age of ninety-one, the old man was dragged, blind and deaf, before the revolutionary tribunal and thence despatched to the guillotine. Between Chauvelin and Machault, the elder D'Argenson, who was greater than either of them, had been raised to power, and then speedily hurled down from it (1747), for no better reason than that his manners were uncouth, and that he would not waste his time in frivolities that were as the breath of life in the great gallery at Versailles and on the smooth-shaven lawns of Fontainebleau.

Not only had wise counsellors been tried; consultative assemblies had been tried also. Necker had been dismissed in 1781, after publishing the memorable Report which first initiated the nation in the elements of financial knowledge. The disorder waxed greater, and the monarchy drew nearer to bankruptcy each year. The only modern parallel to the state of things in France under Lewis the Sixteenth is to be sought in the state of things in Egypt or in Turkey. Lewis the Fourteenth had left a debt of between two and three thousand millions of livres, but this had been wiped out by the heroic operations of Law; operations, by the way, which have never yet been scientifically criticised. But the debt soon grew again, by foolish wars, by the prodigality of the court, and by the rapacity of the nobles. It amounted in 1789 to something like two hundred and forty millions sterling; and it is interesting to notice that this was exactly the sum of the public debt of Great Britain at the same time. The year's excess of expenditure over receipts in 1774 was about fifty millions of livres: in 1787 it was one hundred and forty millions, or according to a different computation even two hundred millions. The material case was not at all desperate, if only the court had been less infatuated, and the spirit of the privileged orders had been less blind and less vile. The fatality of the situation lay in the characters of a handful of men and women. For France was abundant in resources, and even at this moment was far from unprosperous, in spite of the incredible trammels of law and custom. An able financier, with the

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support of a popular chamber and the assent of the sovereign, could have had no difficulty in restoring the public credit. But the conditions, simple as they might seem to a patriot or to posterity, were unattainable so long as power remained with a caste that were anything we please except patriots. An Assembly of Notables was brought together, but it was only the empty phantasm of national representation. Yet the situation was so serious that even this body, of arbitrary origin as it was, still was willing to accept vital reforms. The privileged order, who were then as their descendants are now, the worst conservative party in Europe, immediately persuaded the magisterial corporation to resist the Notables. The judicial corporation or Parlement of Paris had been suppressed under Lewis the Fifteenth, and unfortunately revived again at the accession of his grandson. By the inconvenient constitution of the French government, the assent of that body was indispensable to fiscal legislation, on the ground that such legislation was part of the general police of the realm. The king's minister, now Loménie de Brienne, devised a new judicial constitution. But the churchmen, the nobles, and the lawyers all united in protestations against such a blow. The common people are not always the best judges of a remedy for the evils under which they are the greatest sufferers, and they broke out in disorder both in Paris and the provinces. They discerned an attack upon their local independence. Nobody would accept office in the new courts, and the administration of justice was at a standstill. A loan was thrown upon the market, but the public could not be persuaded to take it up. It was impossible to collect the taxes. The interest on the national debt was unpaid, and the fundholder was dismayed and exasperated by an announcement that only two-fifths would be discharged in cash. A very large part of the national debt was held in the form of annuities for lives, and men who had invested their savings on the credit of the government, saw themselves left without a provision. The total number of fundholders cannot be ascertained with any precision, but it must have been very considerable, especially in Paris and the other great cities. Add to these all the civil litigants in the kingdom, who had portions of their property virtually sequestered by the suspension of the courts into which the property had been taken. The resentment of this immense body of defrauded public creditors and injured private suitors explains the alienation of the middle class from the monarchy. In the convulsions of our own time, the moneyed interests have been on one side, and the population without money on the other. But in the first and greatest convulsion, those who had nothing to lose found their animosities shared by those who had had something to lose, and had lost it.

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Deliberative assemblies, then, had been tried, and ministers had been tried; both had failed, and there was no other device left, except one which was destructive to absolute monarchy. Lewis the Sixteenth was in 1789 in much the same case as that of the King of England in 1640. Charles had done his best to raise money without any parliament for twelve years: he had lost patience with the Short Parliament; finally, he was driven without choice or alternative to face as he best could the stout resolution and the wise patriotism of the Long Parliament. Men sometimes wonder how it was that Lewis, when he came to find the National Assembly unmanageable, and discovering how rapidly he was drifting towards the thunders of the revolutionary cataract, did not break up a Chamber over which neither the court, nor even a minister so popular as Necker, had the least control. It is a question whether the sword would not have broken in his hand. Even supposing, however, that the army would have consented to a violent movement against the Assembly, the King would still have been left in the same desperate straits from which he had looked to the States-General to extricate him. He might perhaps have dispersed the Assembly; he could not disperse debt and deficit. Those monsters would have haunted him as implacably as ever. There was no new formula of exorcism, nor any untried enchantment. The success of violent designs against the National Assembly, had success been possible, could, after all, have been followed by no other consummation than the relapse of France into the raging anarchy of Poland, or the sullen decrepitude of Turkey.

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This will seem to some persons no better than fatalism. But, in truth, there are two popular ways of reading the history of events between 1789 and 1794, and each of them seems to us as bad as the other. According to one, whatever happened in the Revolution was good and admirable, because it happened. According to the other, something good and admirable was always attainable, and, if only bad men had not interposed, always ready to happen. Of course, the only sensible view is that many of the revolutionary solutions were detestable, but no other solution was within reach. This is undoubtedly the best of possible worlds; if the best is not so good as we could wish, that is the fault of the possibilities. Such a doctrine is neither fatalism nor optimism, but an honest recognition of long chains of cause and effect in human affairs.

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The great gathering of chosen men was first called States-General; then it called itself National Assembly; it is commonly known in history as the Constituent Assembly. The name is of ironical association, for the constitution which it framed after much travail endured for no more than a few months. Its deliberations lasted from May 1789 until September 1791. Among its members were three principal groups. There was, first, a band of blind adherents of the old system of government with all or most of its abuses. Second, there was a Centre of timid and one-eyed men, who were for transforming the old absolutist system into something that should resemble the constitution of our own country. Finally, there was a Left, with some differences of shade, but all agreeing in the necessity of a thorough remodelling of every institution and most of the usages of the country. 'Silence, you thirty votes!' cried Mirabeau one day, when he was interrupted by the dissents of the Mountain. This was the original measure of the party that in the twinkling of an eye was to wield the destinies of France. In our own time we have wondered at the rapidity with which a Chamber that was one day on the point of bringing back the grandnephew of Lewis the Sixteenth, found itself a little later voting that Republic which has since been ratified by the nation, and has at this moment the ardent good wishes of every enlightened politician in Europe.

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In the same way it is startling to think that within three years of the beheading of Lewis the Sixteenth, there was probably not one serious republican in the representative assembly of France. Yet it is always so. We might make just the same remark of the House of Commons at Westminster in 1640, and of the Assembly of Massachusetts or of New York as late as 1770. The final flash of a long unconscious train of thought or intent is ever a surprise and a shock. It is a mistake to set these swift changes down to political levity; they were due rather to quickness of political intuition. It was the King's attempt at flight in the summer of 1791 that first created a republican party. It was that unhappy exploit, and no theoretical preferences, that awoke France to the necessity of choosing between the sacrifice of monarchy and the restoration of territorial aristocracy.

Political intuition was never one of Robespierre's conspicuous gifts. But he had a doctrine that for a certain time served the same purpose. Rousseau had kindled in him a fervid democratic enthusiasm, and had penetrated his mind with the principle of the Sovereignty of the People. This famous dogma contained implicitly within it the more indisputable truth that a society ought to be regulated with a view to the happiness of the people. Such a principle made it easier for Robespierre to interpret rightly the first phases of the revolutionary movement. It helped him to discern that the concentrated physical force of the populace was the only sure protection against a civil war. And if a civil war had broken out in 1789, instead of 1793, all the advantages of authority would have been against the popular party. The first insurrection of Paris is associated with the harangue of Camille Desmoulins at the Palais Royal, with the fall of the Bastille, with the murder of the governor, and a hundred other scenes of melodramatic horror and the blood-red picturesque. The insurrection of the Fourteenth of July 1789 taught Robespierre a lesson of practical politics, which exactly fitted in with his previous theories. In his resentment against the oppressive disorder of monarchy and feudalism, he had accepted the counter principle that the people can do no wrong, and nobody of sense now doubts that in their first great act the people of Paris did what was right. Six days after the fall of the Bastille, the Centre were for issuing a proclamation denouncing popular violence and ordering rigorous vigilance. Robespierre was then so little known in the Assembly that even his name was usually misspelt in the journals. From his obscure bench on the Mountain he cried out with bitter vehemence against the proposed proclamation:—'Revolt! But this revolt is liberty. The battle is not at its end. Tomorrow, it may be, the shameful designs against us will be renewed; and who will there then be to repulse them, if beforehand we declare the very men to be rebels, who have rushed to arms for our protection and safety?' This was the cardinal truth of the situation. Everybody knows Mirabeau's saying about Robespierre:—'That man will go far: he believes every word that he says!' This is much, but it is only half. It is not only that the man of power believes what he says; what he believes must fit in with the facts and with the demands of the time. Now Robespierre's firmness of conviction happened at this stage to be rightly matched by his clearness of sight.

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It is true that a passionate mob, its unearthly admixture of laughter with fury, of vacancy with deadly concentration, is as terrible as some uncouth antediluvian, or the unfamiliar monsters of the sea, or one of the giant plants that make men shudder with mysterious fear. The history of our own country in the eighteenth century tells of the riots against meeting-houses in Doctor Sacheverell's time, and the riots against papists and their abettors in Lord George Gordon's time, and Church-and-King riots in Doctor Priestley's time. It would be too daring, therefore, to maintain that the rabble of the poor have any more unerring political judgment than the rabble of the opulent. But, in France in 1789, Robespierre was justified in saying that revolt meant liberty. If there had been no revolt in July, the court party would have had time to mature their infatuated designs of violence against the Assembly. In October these designs had come to life again. The royalists at Versailles had exultant banquets, at which, in the presence of the Queen, they drank confusion to all patriots, and trampled the new emblem of freedom passionately underfoot. The news of this odious folly soon travelled to Paris. Its significance was speedily understood by a populace whose wits were sharpened by famine. Thousands of fire-eyed women and men tramped intrepidly out towards Versailles. If they had done less, the Assembly would have been dispersed or arbitrarily decimated, even though such a measure would certainly have left the government in desperation.

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At that dreadful moment of the Sixth of October, amid the slaughter of guards and the frantic yells of hatred against the Queen, it is no wonder that some were found to urge the King to flee to Metz. If he had accepted the advice, the course of the Revolution would have been different; but its march would have been just as irresistible, for revolution lay in the force of a hundred combined circumstances. Lewis, however, rejected these counsels, and suffered the mob to carry him in bewildering procession to his capital and his prison. That great man who was watching French affairs with such consuming eagerness from distant Beaconsfield in our English Buckinghamshire, instantly divined that this procession from Versailles to the Tuileries marked the fall of the monarchy. 'A revolution in sentiment, manners, and moral opinions, the most important of all revolutions in a word,' was in Burke's judgment to be dated from the Sixth of October 1789.

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The events of that day did, indeed, give its definite cast to the situation. The moral authority of the sovereign came to an end, along with the ancient and reverend mystery of the inviolability of his person. The Count d'Artois, the King's second brother, one of the most worthless of human beings, as incurably addicted to sinister and suicidal counsels in 1789 as he was when he overthrew his own throne forty years later, had run away from peril and from duty after the insurrection of July. After the insurrection of October, a troop of the nobles of the court followed him. The personal cowardice of the Emigrants was only matched by their political blindness.

Many of the most unwise measures in the Assembly were only passed by small majorities, and the majorities would have been transformed into minorities, if in the early days of the Revolution these unworthy men had only stood firm at their posts. Selfish oligarchies have scarcely ever been wanting in courage. The emigrant noblesse of France are almost the only instance of a great privileged and territorial caste that had as little bravery as they had patriotism. The explanation is that they had been an oligarchy, not of power or duty, but of self-indulgence. They were crushed by Richelieu to secure the unity of the monarchy. They now effaced themselves at the Revolution, and this secured that far greater object, the unity of the nation.

The disappearance of so many of the nobles from France was not the only abdication on the part of the conservative powers. Cowed and terrified by the events of October, no less than three hundred members of the Assembly sought to resign. The average attendance even at the most important sittings was often incredibly small. Thus the Chamber came to have little more moral authority in face of the people of Paris than had the King himself. The people of Paris had themselves become in a day the masters of France.

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This immense change led gradually to a decisive alteration in the position of Robespierre. He found the situation of affairs at last falling into perfect harmony with his doctrine. Rousseau had taught him that the people ought to be sovereign, and now the people were being recognised as sovereign *de facto* no less than *de jure*. Any limitations on the new divine right united the horror of blasphemy to the secular wickedness of political treason. After the Assembly had come to Paris, a famishing mob in a moment of mad fury murdered an unfortunate baker, who was suspected of keeping back bread. These paroxysms led to the enactment of a new martial law. Robespierre spoke vehemently against it; such a law implied a wrongful distrust of the people. Then discussions followed as to the property qualification of an elector. Citizens were classed as active and passive. Only those were to have votes who paid direct taxes to the amount of three days' wages in the year. Robespierre flung himself upon this too famous distinction with bitter tenacity. If all men are equal, he cried, then all men ought to have votes: if he who only pays the amount of one day's work, has fewer rights than another who pays the amount of three days, why should not the man who pays ten days have more rights than the other who only pays the earnings of three days? This kind of reasoning had little weight with the Chamber, but it made the reasoner very popular with the throng in the galleries. Even within the Assembly, influence gradually came to the man who had a parcel of immutable axioms and postulates, and who was ready with a deduction and a phrase for each case as it arose. He began to stand out like a needle of sharp rock, amid the flitting shadows of uncertain purpose and the vapoury drift of wandering aims.

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Robespierre had no social conception, and he had nothing which can be described as a policy. He was the prophet of a sect, and had at this period none of the aims of the chief of a political party. What he had was democratic doctrine, and an intrepid logic. And Robespierre's intrepid logic was the nearest approach to calm force and coherent character that the first three years of the Revolution brought into prominence. When the Assembly met, Necker was the popular idol. Almost within a few weeks, this well-meaning, but very incompetent divinity had slipped from his throne, and Lafayette had taken his place. Mirabeau came next. The ardent and animated genius of his eloquence fitted him above all men to ride the whirlwind and direct the storm. And on the memorable Twenty-third of June '89, he had shown the genuine audacity and resource of a revolutionary statesman, when he stirred the Chamber to defy the King's demand, and hailed the royal usher with the resounding words:—'You, sir, have neither place nor right of speech. Go tell those who sent you that we are here by the will of the people, and only bayonets shall drive us hence!' But Mirabeau bore a tainted character, and was always distrusted. 'Ah, how the immorality of my youth,' he used to say, in words that sum up the tragedy of many a puissant life, 'how the immorality of my youth hinders the public good!' The event proved that the popular suspicion was just: the patriot is now no longer merely suspected, but known, to have sullied his hands with the money of the court. He did not sell himself, it has been said; he allowed himself to be paid. The distinction was too subtle for men doing battle for their lives and for freedom, and Mirabeau's popularity waned towards the middle of 1790. The next favourite was Barnave, the generous and high-minded spokesman of those sanguine spirits who to the very end hoped against hope to save both the throne and its occupant. By the spring of 1791 Barnave followed his predecessors into disfavour. The Assembly was engaged on the burning question of the government of the colonies. Were the negro slaves to be admitted to citizenship, or was a legislature of planters to be entrusted with the task of social reformation? Our own generation has seen in the republic of the West what strife this political difficulty is capable of raising. Barnave pronounced against the negroes. Robespierre, on the contrary, declaimed against any limitation of the right of the negro, as a compromise with the avarice, pride, and cruelty of a governing race, and a guilty trafficking with the rights of man. Barnave from that day saw that his laurel crown had gone to Robespierre.

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If the people 'called him noble that was now their hate, him vile that was their garland,' they did not transfer their affections without sound reason. Barnave's sensibility was too easily touched. There are many politicians in every epoch whose principles grow slack and flaccid at the approach of the golden sun of royalty. Barnave was one of those who was sent to bring back the fugitive King and Queen from Varennes, and the journey by their side in the coach unstrung his spirit. He became one of the court's clandestine advisers. Men of this weak susceptibility of imagination are not fit for times of revolution. To be on the side of the court was to betray the cause of the nation. We cannot take too much pains to realise that the voluntary conversion of Lewis the Sixteenth to a popular constitution and the abolition of feudalism, was practically as

impossible as the conversion of Pope Pius the Ninth to the doctrine of a free church in a free state. Those who believe in the miracle of free will may think of this as they please. Sensible people who accept the scientific account of human character, know that the sudden transformation of a man or a woman brought up to middle age as the heir to centuries of absolutist tradition, into adherents of a government that agreed with the doctrines of Locke and Milton, was only possible on condition of supernatural interference. The King's good nature was no substitute for political capacity or insight. An instructive measure of the degree in which he possessed these two qualities may be found in that deplorable diary of his, where on such days as the Fourteenth of July, when the Bastille fell, and the Sixth of October, when he was carried in triumph from Versailles to the Tuileries, he made the simple entry, '*Rien.*' And he had no firmness. It was as difficult to keep the King to a purpose, La Marck said to Mirabeau, as to keep together a number of well-oiled ivory balls. Lewis, moreover, was guided by a more energetic and less compliant character than his own.

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Marie Antoinette's high mien in adversity, and the contrast between the dazzling splendour of her first years and the scenes of outrage and bloody death that made the climax of her fate, could not but strike the imaginations of men. Such contrasts are the very stuff of which Tragedy, the gorgeous muse with scepter'd pall, loves to weave her most imposing raiment. But history must be just; and the character of the Queen had far more concern in the disaster of the first five years of the Revolution than had the character of Robespierre. Every new document that comes to light heaps up proof that if blind and obstinate choice of personal gratification before the common weal be enough to constitute a state criminal, then the Queen of France was one of the worst state criminals that ever afflicted a nation. The popular hatred of Marie Antoinette sprang from a sound instinct. We shall never know how much or how little truth there was in those frightful charges against her, that may still be read in a thousand pamphlets. These imputed depravities far surpass anything that John Knox ever said against Mary Stuart, or that Juvenal has recorded against Messalina; and, perhaps, for the only parallel we must look to the hideous stories of the Byzantine secretary against Theodora, the too famous empress of Justinian and the persecutor of Belisarius. We have to remember that all the revolutionary portraits are distorted by furious passion, and that Marie Antoinette may no more deserve to be compared to Mary Stuart than Robespierre deserves to be compared to Ezzelino or to Alva. The aristocrats were the libellers, if libels they were. It is at least certain that, from the unlucky hour when the Austrian archduchess crossed the French frontier, a childish bride of fourteen, down to the hour when the Queen of France made the attempt to recross it in resentful flight one and twenty years afterwards, Marie Antoinette was ignorant, unteachable, blind to events and deaf to good counsels, a bitter grief to her heroic mother, the evil genius of her husband, the despair of her truest advisers, and an exceedingly bad friend to the people of France. When Burke had that immortal vision of her at Versailles—'just above the horizon, decorating and cheering the elevated sphere she just began to move in, glittering like the morning star, full of life and splendour and joy'—we know from the correspondence between Maria Theresa and her minister at Versailles, that what Burke really saw was no divinity, but a flighty and troublesome schoolgirl, an accomplice in all the ignoble intrigues, and a sharer of all the small busy passions, that convulse the insects of a court. The levity that came with her Lorraine blood, broke out in incredible dissipations; in indiscreet visits to the masked balls at the opera, in midnight parades and mystifications on the terrace at Versailles, in insensate gambling. 'The court of France is turned into a gaming-hell,' said the Emperor Joseph, the Queen's own brother: 'if they do not amend, the revolution will be cruel.' These vices or follies were less mischievous than her intervention in affairs of state. Here her levity was as marked as in the paltry affairs of the boudoir and the ante-chamber, and here to levity she added both dissimulation and vindictiveness. It was the Queen's influence that procured the dismissal of the two virtuous ministers by whose aid the King was striving to arrest the decay of the government of his kingdom. Malesherbes was distasteful to her for no better reason than that she wanted his post for some favourite's favourite. Against Turgot she conspired with tenacious animosity, because he had suppressed a sinecure which she designed for a court parasite, and because he would not support her caprice on behalf of a worthless creature of her faction. These two admirable men were disgraced on the same day. The Queen wrote to her mother that she had not meddled in the affair. This was a falsehood, for she had even sought to have Turgot thrown into the Bastille. 'I am as one dashed to the ground,' cried the great Voltaire, now nearing his end. 'Never can we console ourselves for having seen the golden age dawn and vanish. My eyes see only death in front of me, now that Turgot is gone. The rest of my days must be all bitterness.' What hope could there be that the personage who had thus put out the light of hope for France in 1776, would welcome that greater flame which was kindled in the land in 1789?

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When people write hymns of pity for the Queen, we always recall the poor woman whom Arthur Young met, as he was walking up a hill to ease his horse near Mars-le-Tour. Though the unfortunate creature was only twenty-eight, she might have been taken for sixty or seventy, her figure was so bent, her face so furrowed and hardened by toil. Her husband, she said, had a morsel of land, one cow, and a poor little horse, yet he had to pay forty-two pounds of wheat and three chickens to one Seigneur, and one hundred and sixty pounds of oats, one chicken, and one franc to another, besides very heavy tailles and other taxes; and they had seven children. She had heard that 'something was to be done by some great folks for such poor ones, but she did not know who nor how, but God send us better, for the tailles and the dues grind us to the earth.' It was such hapless drudges as this who replenished the Queen's gaming tables at Versailles. Thousands of them dragged on the burden of their harassed and desperate days, less like men and women than beasts of the field wrung and tortured and mercilessly overladen, in order that

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the Queen might gratify her childish passion for diamonds, or lavish money and estates on worthless female Polignacs and Lamballes, or kill time at a cost of five hundred louis a night at lansquenet and the faro bank. The Queen, it is true, was in all this no worse than other dissipated women then and since. She did not realise that it was the system to which she had stubbornly committed herself, that drove the people of the fields to cut their crops green to be baked in the oven, because their hunger could not wait; or made them cower whole days in their beds, because misery seemed to gnaw them there with a duller fang. That she was unconscious of its effect, makes no difference in the real drift of her policy; makes no difference in the judgment that we ought to pass upon it, nor in the gratitude that is owed to the stern men who rose up to consume her and her court with righteous flame. The Queen and the courtiers, and the hard-faring woman of Mars-le-Tour, and that whole generation, have long been dust and shadow; they have vanished from the earth, as if they were no more than the fire-flies that the peasant of the Italian poet saw dancing in the vineyard, as he took his evening rest on the hillside. They have all fled back into the impenetrable shade whence they came; our minds are free; and if social equity is not a chimera, Marie Antoinette was the protagonist of the most barbarous and execrable of causes.

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Let us return to the shaping of the Constitution, not forgetting that its stability was to depend upon the Queen. Robespierre left some characteristic marks on the final arrangements. He imposed upon the Assembly a motion prohibiting any member of it from accepting office under the Crown for a period of four years after the dissolution. Robespierre from this time forth constantly illustrated a very singular truth; namely, that the most ostentatious faith in humanity in general seems always to beget the sharpest distrust of all human beings in particular. He proceeded further in the same direction. It was Robespierre who persuaded the Chamber to pass a self-denying ordinance. All its members were declared ineligible for a seat in the legislature that was to replace them. The members of the Right on this occasion went with their bitter foes of the Extreme Left, and to both parties have been imputed sinister and Machiavellian motives. The Right, aware that their own return to the new Assembly was impossible, were delighted to reduce the men with whom they had been carrying on incensed battle for two long years, to their own obscurity and impotence. Robespierre, on the other hand, is accused of a jealous desire to exclude Barnave from power. He is accused also of a deliberate intention to weaken the new legislature, in order to secure the preponderance of the Parisian clubs. There is no evidence that these malignant feelings were in Robespierre's mind. The reasons he gave were exactly of the kind that we should have expected to weigh with a man of his stamp. There is even a certain truth in them, that is not inconsistent with the experience of a parliamentary country like our own. To talk, he said, of the transmission of light and experience from one assembly to another, was to distrust the public spirit. The influence of opinion and the general good grows less, as the influence of parliamentary orators grows greater. He had no taste, he proceeded with one of his chilly sneers, for that new science which was styled the tactics of great assemblies; it was too like intrigue. Nothing but truth and reason ought to reign in a legislature. He did not like the idea of clever men becoming dominant by skilful tactics, and then perpetuating their empire from one assembly to another. He wound up his discourse with some theatrical talk about disinterestedness. When he sat down, he was greeted with enthusiastic acclamations, such as a few months before used to greet the stormful Mirabeau, now wrapped in eternal sleep amid the stillness of the new Pantheon. The folly of Robespierre's inferences is obvious enough. If only truth and reason ought to weigh in a legislature, then it is all the more important not to exclude any body of men through whom truth and reason may possibly enter. Robespierre had striven hard to remove all restrictions from admission to the electoral franchise. He did not see that to limit the choice of candidates was in itself the most grievous of all restrictions.

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The common view has been that the Constitution of 1791 perished because its creators were thus disabled from defending the work of their hands. This view led to a grave mistake four years later, after Robespierre had gone to his grave. The Convention, framing the Constitution of the Year III., decided that two-thirds of the existing assembly should keep their places, and that only one-third should be popularly elected. This led to the revolt of the Thirteenth Vendémiaire, and afterwards to the coup d'état of the Eighteenth Fructidor. In that sense, no doubt, Robespierre's proposal was the indirect root of much mischief. But it is childish to believe that if a hundred of the most prominent members of the Constituent had found seats in the new assembly, they would have saved the Constitution. Their experience, the loss of which it is the fashion to deplore, could have had no application to the strange combinations of untoward circumstance that were now rising up with such deadly rapidity in every quarter of the horizon, like vast sombre banks of impenetrable cloud. Prudence in new cases, as has been somewhere said, can do nothing on grounds of retrospect. The work of the Constituent was doomed by the very nature of things. Their assumption that the Revolution was made, while all France was still torn by fierce and unappeasable disputes as to seignorial rights, was one of the most striking pieces of self-deception in history. It is told how in the eleventh century, when the fervent hosts of the Crusaders tramped across Europe on their way to deliver the Holy City from the hands of the unbelievers, the wearied children, as they espied each new town that lay in their interminable march, cried out with joyful expectation, 'Is not this, then, Jerusalem?' So France had set out on a portentous journey, little knowing how far off was the end; lightly taking each poor halting-place for the deeply longed-for goal; and waxing more fiercely disappointed, as each new height that they gained only disclosed yet farther and more unattainable horizons. 'Alas,' said Burke, 'they

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little know how many a weary step is to be taken, before they can form themselves into a mass which has a true political personality.'

An immense revolution had been effected, but by what force were its fruits to be guarded? Each step in the revolution had raised a host of irreconcilable enemies. The rights of property, the old and jealous associations of local independence, the traditions of personal dignity, the relations of the civil to the spiritual power—these were the momentous matters about which the lawmakers of the Constituent had exercised themselves. The parties of the Chamber had for these two years past been laying mine and countermine among the very deepest foundations of society. One by one each great corporation of the old order had been alienated from the new order. It was inevitable that it should be so. Let us look at one or two examples of this. The monarchy had imposed administrative centralisation upon France without securing national unity. Thus the great provinces that had been slowly added one after the other to the monarchy, while becoming members of the same kingdom, still retained different institutions and isolated usages. The time was now come when France should be France, and its inhabitants Frenchmen, and no longer Bretons, Normans, Gascons, Provençals. The Assembly by a single decree (1790) redivided the country into eighty-three departments. It wiped out at a stroke the separate administrations, the separate parlements, the peculiar privileges, and even the historic names of the old provinces. We need not dwell on the significance of this change here, but will only remark in passing that the stubborn disputes from the time of the Regency downwards between the Crown and the provincial parlements turned, under other names and in other forms, upon this very issue of the unification of the law. The Crown was with the progressive party, but it lacked the strength and courage to set aside retrograde local sentiment as the Constituent Assembly was able to set it aside.

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Then this prodigious change in the distribution of government was accompanied by no less prodigious a change in the source of power. Popular election replaced the old system of territorial privilege and aristocratic prerogative. The effect of this vital innovation, followed as it was a few months later by a decree abolishing titles and armorial bearings, was to complete the estrangement of the old privileged classes from the revolutionary movement. All that they had meant to concede was the payment of an equal land tax. What was life worth to the noble, if common people were to be allowed to wear arms and to command a company of foot or a troop of horse; if he was no longer to have thousands of acres left waste for the chase; if he was compelled to sue for a vote where he had only yesterday reigned as manorial lord; if, in short, he was at a stroke to lose all those delights of insolence and vanity which had made, not the decoration, but the very substance, of his days?

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Nor were the nobles of the sword and the red-heeled slipper the only outraged class. The magistracy of the provincial parliaments were inflamed with resentment against changes that stripped them of the power of exciting against the new government the same factious and impracticable spirit with which they had on so many occasions embarrassed the old. The clergy were thrown even still more violently into opposition. The Assembly, sorely pressed for resources, declared the property held by ecclesiastics, amounting to a revenue of not less than eight million pounds sterling a year, or double that amount in modern values, to be the property of the nation. Talleyrand carried a measure decreeing the sale of the ecclesiastical domain. The clergy were as intensely irritated as laymen would have been by a similar assertion of sovereign right. And their irritation was made still more dangerous by the next set of measures against them.

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The Assembly withdrew all recognition of Catholicism as the religion of the State; monastic vows were abolished, and orders and congregations suppressed; the ecclesiastical divisions were made to coincide with the civil divisions, a bishop being allotted to each department. What was a more important revolution than all, bishops and incumbents were henceforth to be appointed by popular election. The Assembly, who had always the institutions of our own country before them, meant to introduce into France the system of the Church of England, which was even then an anachronism in the land of its birth; much worse was such a system an anachronism, after belief had been sapped by a Voltaire and an Encyclopædia. The clergy both showed and excited a mutinous spirit. The Assembly, by way of retort, decreed that all ecclesiastics should take the oath of allegiance to the civil constitution of the clergy, on pain of forfeiture of their benefices. Five-sixths of the clergy refused, and the result was an outbreak of religious fury in the great towns of the south and elsewhere, which recalled the violence of the sixteenth century and the Reformation.

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Thus when the Constituent Assembly ceased from its labours, the popular party had to face the mocking and defiant privileged classes; the magistracy, whose craft and calling were gone; and the clergy and as many of the flocks as shared the holy vindictiveness of their pastors. Immense material improvements had been made, but who was to guard them against all these powerful and exasperated bands? No chamber could execute so portentous an office, least of all a chamber that was bound to work in accord with a King, who at the very moment when he was swearing fidelity to the new order of things, was sending entreaties to the King of Prussia and to the Emperor, his brother-in-law, to overthrow the new order and bring back the old. If the Revolution had achieved priceless gains for France, they could only be preserved on condition that public action was directed by those who valued these gains for themselves and for their children above all things else—above the monarchy, above the constitution, above peace, above their own sorry lives. There was only one party who showed this passionate devotion, this fanatical resolution not to suffer the work that had been done to be undone, and never to allow France to sink back from exalted national life into the lethargy of national death. That party was the Jacobins, and, above

all, the austere and rigorous Jacobins of Paris. On their ascendancy depended the triumph of the Revolution, and on the triumph of the Revolution depended the salvation of France. Their ascendancy meant a Jacobin dictatorship, and against this, as against dictatorship in all its forms, many things have been said, and truly said. But the one most important thing that can be said about Jacobin dictatorship is that, in spite of all the dolorous mishaps and hateful misdeeds that marked its course, it was still the only instrument capable of concentrating and utilising the dispersed social energy of the French people. The crisis was not a crisis of logic but of force, and the Jacobins alone understood, as the old Covenanters had understood, that problems of force are not solved by phrases, but by mastery and the sword.

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The great popular club of Paris was the centre of all those who looked at events in this spirit. The Legislative Assembly, the successor of the Constituent, met in the month of October 1791. Like its predecessor, the Legislative contained a host of excellent and patriotic men, and they at once applied themselves to the all-important task, which the Constituent had left so deplorably incomplete, of finally breaking down the old feudal rights. The most important group in the new chamber were the deputies from the Gironde. Events soon revealed violent dissents between the Girondins and the Jacobins, but, for some months after the meeting of the Legislative, Girondins and Jacobins represented together in unbroken unity the great popular party. From this time until the fall of the monarchy, the whole of this popular party in all its branches found their rallying-place, not in the Assembly, but in the Jacobin Club; and the ascendancy of the Jacobin Club embodied the dictatorship of Paris. It was only from Paris that the whole circle of events could be commanded. When the peasants had got what they wanted, that is to say the emancipation of the land, they were ready to think that the Revolution was in safety and at an end. They were in no position to see the enmity of the exiles, the dangerous selfishness of Austria and Prussia, the disloyal machinations of the court, the reactionary sentiment of La Vendée, the absolute unworkableness of the new constitution. Arthur Young, in the height of the agitations of the Constituent Assembly, found himself at Moulins, the capital of the Bourbonnais, and on the great post-road to Italy. He went to the best coffee-house in the town, and found as many as twenty tables spread for company, but as for a newspaper, he says he might as well have asked for an elephant. In the capital of a great province, the seat of an intendant, at a moment like that, with a National Assembly voting a revolution, and not a newspaper to tell the people whether Fayette, Mirabeau, or Lewis XVI. were on the throne! Could such a people as this, he cries, ever have made a revolution or become free? 'Never in a thousand centuries: the enlightened mob of Paris have done the whole.' And that was the plain truth. What was involved in such a truth, we shall see presently.

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Robespierre had now risen to be one of the foremost men in France. To borrow the figure of an older chief of French faction, from trifling among the violins in the orchestra, he had ascended to the stage itself, and had a right to perform leading parts. Disqualified for sitting in the Assembly, he wielded greater power than ever in the Club. The Constituent had been full of his enemies. 'Alone with my own soul,' he once cried to the Jacobins, 'how could I have borne struggles that were beyond any human strength, if I had not raised my spirit to God?' This isolation marked him with a kind of theocratic distinction. These communings with the unseen powers gave a certain indefinable prerogative to a man, even among the children of the century of Voltaire. Condorcet, the youngest of the intimates and disciples of Voltaire, of D'Alembert, of Turgot, was the first to sound bitter warning that Robespierre was at heart a priest. The suggestion was more than a gibe. Robespierre had the typic sacerdotal temperament, its sense of personal importance, its thin unction, its private leanings to the stake and the cord; and he had one of those deplorable natures that seem as if they had never in their lives known the careless joys of a springtime. By and by, from mere priest he developed into the deadlier carnivore, the Inquisitor.

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The absence of advantages of bodily presence has never been fatal to the pretensions of the pontiff. Robespierre was only a couple of inches above five feet in height, but the Grand Monarch himself was hardly more. His eyes were small and weak, and he usually wore spectacles; his face was pitted by the marks of small-pox; his complexion was dull and sometimes livid; the tones of his voice were dry and shrill; and he spoke with the vulgar accent of his province. Such is the accepted tradition, and there is no reason to dissent from it. It is fair, however, to remember that Robespierre's enemies had command of his historic reputation at its source, and this is always a great advantage for faction, if not for truth. So Robespierre's voice and person may have been maligned, just as Aristophanes may have been a calumniator when he accused Cleon of having an intolerably loud voice and smelling of the tanyard. What is certain is that Robespierre was a master of effective oratory adapted for a violent popular audience, to impress, to persuade, and to command. The Convention would have yawned, if it had not trembled under him, but the Jacobin Club never found him tedious. Robespierre's style had no richness either of feeling or of phrase; no fervid originality, no happy violences. If we turn from a page of Rousseau to a page of Robespierre, we feel that the disciple has none of the thrilling sonorousness of the master; the glow and the ardour have become metallic; the long-drawn plangency is parodied by shrill notes of splenetic complaint. The rhythm has no broad wings; the phrases have no quality of radiance; the oratorical glimpses never lift the spirit into new worlds. We are never conscious of those great pulses of strong emotion that shake and vibrate through the nobly-measured periods of Cicero or Bossuet or Burke. Robespierre could not rival the vivid and highly-coloured declamation of Vergniaud; his speeches were never heated with the ardent passion that poured like a torrent of fire through some of the orations of Isnard; nor, above all, had he any mastery of that dialect of the Titans, by which Danton convulsed an audience with fear, with amazement, or with the spirit of defiant endeavour. The absence of these intenser qualities did not make Robespierre's speeches less effective for their own purpose. On the contrary, when the air has

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become torrid, and passionate utterance is cheap, then severity in form is very likely to pass for good sense in substance. That Robespierre had decent fluency, copiousness, and finish, need hardly be said. The French have an artistic sense; they have never accepted our own whimsical doctrine, that a man's politics must be sagacious, if his speaking is only clumsy enough. Robespierre more than once showed himself ready with a forcible reply on critical occasions: this only makes him an illustration the more of the good oratorical rule, that he is most likely to come well out of the emergency of an improvisation, who is usually most careful to prepare. Robespierre was as solicitous about the correctness of his speech, as he was about the neatness of his clothes; he no more grudged the pains given to the polishing of his discourses than he grudged the time given every day to the powdering of his hair.

Nothing was more remarkable than his dexterity in presenting his case. James Mill used to point out to his son among other skilful arts of Demosthenes, these two: first, that he said everything important to his purpose at the exact moment when he had brought the minds of his hearers into the state most fitted to receive it; second, that he insinuated gradually and indirectly into their minds ideas which would have roused opposition if they had been expressed more directly. Mr. Mill once called the attention of the present writer to exactly the same kind of rhetorical skill in the speeches of Robespierre. The reader may do well to turn, for excellent specimens of this, to the speech of January 11, 1792, against the war, or that of May 1794 against atheism. The logic is stringent, but the premises are arbitrary. Robespierre is as one who should iterate indisputable propositions of abstract geometry and mechanics, while men are craving an architect who shall bridge the gulf of waters. Exuberance of high words no longer conceals the sterility of his ideas and the shallowness of his method. We should say of his speeches, as of so much of the speaking and writing of the time, that it is transparent and smooth, but there is none of that quality which the critics of painting call Texture.

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His listeners, however, in the old refectory of the Convent of the Jacobins took little heed of these things; the matter was too absorbing, the issue too vital. A hundred years before, the hunted Covenanters of the Western Lowlands, with Claverhouse's dragoons a few miles off, exulted in the endless exhortations and expositions of their hill preachers: they relished nothing so keenly as three hours of Mucklewrath, followed by three hours more of Peter Poundtext. We now find the jargon of the Mucklewraths and the Poundtexts of the Solemn League and Covenant, dead as it is, still not devoid of the picturesque and the impressive. If we cannot say the same of the great preacher of the Declaration of the Rights of Man, the reason is partly that time has not yet softened the tones, and partly that there is no one in all the world with whom it is so difficult to sympathise, as with the narrower fanatics of our own particular faith.

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We have still to mark the trait that above everything else gave to Robespierre the trust and confidence of Paris. As men listened to him, they had full faith in the integrity of the speaker. And Robespierre in one way deserved this confidence. He was eminently the possessor of a conscience. When the strain of circumstance in the last few months of his life pressed him towards wrong, at least before doing wrong he was forced to lie to his own conscience. This is a kind of honesty, as the world goes. In the Salon of 1791 an artist exhibited Robespierre's portrait, simply inscribing it, *The Incorruptible*. Throngs passed before it every day, and ratified the honourable designation by eager murmurs of approval. The democratic journals were loud in panegyric on the unsleeping sentinel of liberty. They loved to speak of him as the modern Fabricius, and delighted to recall the words of Pyrrhus, that it is easier to turn the sun from its course, than to turn Fabricius from the path of honour. Patriotic parents eagerly besought him to be sponsor for their children. Ladies of wealth, including at least one countrywoman of our own, vainly entreated him to accept their purses, for women are quick to recognise the temperament of the priest, and recognising they adore. A rich widow of Nantes besought him with pertinacious tenderness to accept not only her purse but her hand. Mirabeau's sister hailed him as an eagle floating through the blue heavens.

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Robespierre's life was frugal and simple, as must always be seemly in the spokesman of the dumb multitude whose lives are very hard. He had a single room in the house of Duplay, at the extreme west end of the long Rue Saint Honoré, half a mile from the Jacobin Club, and less than that from the Riding School of the Tuileries, where the Constituent and Legislative Assemblies held session. His room, which served him for bed-chamber as well as for the uses of the day, was scantily furnished, and he shared the homely fare of his host. Duplay was a carpenter, a sworn follower of Robespierre, and the whole family cherished their guest as if he had been a son and a brother. Between him and the eldest daughter of the house there grew up a more tender sentiment, and Robespierre looked forward to the joys of the hearth, so soon as his country should be delivered from the oppressors without and the traitors within.

Eagerly as Robespierre delighted in his popularity, he intended it to be a force and not a decoration. An occasion of testing his influence arose in the winter of 1791. The situation had become more and more difficult. The court was more disloyal and more perverse, as its hopes that the nightmare would come to an end became fainter. In the summer of 1791, the German Emperor, the King of Prussia, and minor champions of retrograde causes issued the famous Declaration of Pilnitz. The menace of intervention was the one element needed to make the position of the monarchy desperate. It roused France to fever heat. For along with the foreign kings were the French princes of the blood and the French nobles. In the spring of 1792, the Assembly forced the King to declare war against Austria. Robespierre, in spite of the strong tide of warlike feeling, led the Jacobin opposition to the war. This is one of the most sagacious acts of his career, for the hazards of the conflict were terrible. If the foreigners and the emigrant nobles

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were victorious, all that the Revolution had won would be instantly and irretrievably lost. If, on the other hand, the French armies were victorious, one of two disasters might follow. Either the troops might become a weapon in the hands of the court and the reactionary party, for the suppression of all the progressive parties alike; or else their general might make himself supreme. Robespierre divined, what the Girondins did not, that Narbonne and the court, in accepting the cry for war, were secretly designing, first, to crush the faction of emigrant nobles, then to make the King popular at home, and thus finally to construct a strong royalist army. The Constitutional party in the Legislative Assembly had the same ideas as Narbonne. The Girondins sought war; first, from a genuine, if not a profoundly wise, enthusiasm for liberty, which they would fain have spread all over the world; and next, because they thought that war would increase their popularity, and give them decisive control of the situation.

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The first effect of the war declared in April 1792 was to shake down the throne. Operations had no sooner begun than the King became an object of bitter and amply warranted suspicion. Neither the leaders nor the people had forgotten his flight a year before to place himself at the head of the foreign invaders, nor the letter that he had left behind him for the National Assembly, protesting against all that had been done. They were again reminded of what short shrift they might expect if the King's friends should come back. The Duke of Brunswick at the head of the foreign army set out on his march, and issued his famous proclamation to the inhabitants of France. He demanded immediate and unconditional submission; he threatened with fire and sword every town, village, or hamlet, that should dare to defend itself; and finally, he swore that if the smallest violence or insult were done to the King or his family, the city of Paris should be handed over to military execution and absolute destruction. This insensate document bears marks in every line of the implacable hate and burning thirst for revenge that consumed the aristocratic refugees. Only civil war can awaken such rage as Brunswick's manifesto betrayed. It was drawn up by the French nobles at Coblenz. He merely signed it. The reply to it was the memorable insurrection of the Tenth of August 1792. The King was thrown into prison, and the Legislative Assembly made way for the National Convention.

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Robespierre's part in the great rising of August was only secondary. Only a few weeks before he had started a journal and written articles in a constitutional sense. M. d'Héricault believes a story that Robespierre's aim in this had been to have himself accepted as tutor for the young Dauphin. It is impossible to prove a negative, but we find great difficulty in believing that such a post could ever have been an object of Robespierre's ambition. Now and always he showed a rather singular preference for the substance of power over its glitter. He was vain and an egoist, but in spite of this, and in spite of his passion for empty phrases, he was not without a sense of reality.

The insurrection of the 10th of August, however, was the idea, not of Robespierre, but of a more commanding personage, who now became one of the foremost of the Jacobin chiefs. De Maistre, that ardent champion of reaction, found a striking argument for the presence of the divine hand in the Revolution, in the intense mediocrity of the revolutionary leaders. How could such men, he asked, have achieved such results, if they had not been instruments of the directing will of heaven? Danton at any rate is above this caustic criticism. Danton was of the Herculean type of a Luther, though without Luther's deep vision of spiritual things; or a Chatham, though without Chatham's august majesty of life; or a Cromwell, though without Cromwell's calm steadfastness of patriotic purpose. His visage and port seemed to declare his character: dark overhanging brows; eyes that had the gleam of lightning; a savage mouth; an immense head; the voice of a Stentor. Madame Roland pictured him as a fiercer Sardanapalus. Artists called him Jove the Thunderer. His enemies saw in him the Satan of the Paradise Lost. He was no moral regenerator; the difference between him and Robespierre is typified in Danton's version of an old saying, that he who hates vices hates men. He was not free from that careless life-contemning desperation, which sometimes belongs to forcible natures. Danton cannot be called noble, because nobility implies a purity, an elevation, and a kind of seriousness which were not his. He was too heedless of his good name, and too blind to the truth that though right and wrong may be near neighbours, yet the line that separates them is of an awful sacredness. If Robespierre passed for a hypocrite by reason of his scruple, Danton seemed a desperado by his airs of 'immoral thoughtlessness.' But the world forgives much to a royal size, and Danton was one of the men who strike deep notes. He had that largeness of motive, fulness of nature, and capaciousness of mind, which will always redeem a multitude of infirmities.

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Though the author of some of the most tremendous and far-sounding phrases of an epoch that was only too rich in them, yet phrases had no empire over him; he was their master, not their dupe. Of all the men who succeeded Mirabeau as directors of the unchained forces, we feel that Danton alone was in his true element. Action, which poisoned the blood of such men as Robespierre, and drove such men as Vergniaud out of their senses with exaltation, was to Danton his native sphere. When France was for a moment discouraged, it was he who nerved her to new effort by the electrifying cry, '*We must dare, and again dare, and without end dare!*' If his rivals or his friends seemed too intent on trifles, too apt to confound side issues with the central aim of the battle, Danton was ever ready to urge them to take a juster measure:—'*When the edifice is all ablaze, I take little heed of the knaves who are pilfering the household goods; I rush to put out the flames.*' When base egoism was compromising a cause more priceless than the personality of any man, it was Danton who made them ashamed by the soul-inspiring exclamation, '*Let my name be blotted out and my memory perish, if only France may be free.*' The Girondins denounced the popular clubs of Paris as hives of lawlessness and outrage. Danton warned them that it were wiser to go to these seething societies and to guide them, than to waste breath in futile denunciation. 'A nation in revolution,' he cried to them, in a superb figure, 'is like the

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bronze boiling and foaming and purifying itself in the cauldron. Not yet is the statue of Liberty cast. Fiercely boils the metal; have an eye on the furnace, or the flame will surely scorch you.' If there was murderous work below the hatches, that was all the more reason why the steersman should keep his hand strong and ready on the wheel, with an eye quick for each new drift in the hurricane, and each new set in the raging currents. This is ever the figure under which one conceives Danton—a Titanic shape doing battle with the fury of the seas, yielding while flood upon flood sweeps wildly over him, and then with unshaken foothold and undaunted front once more surveying the waste of waters, and striving with dexterous energy to force the straining vessel over the waters of the bar.

La Fayette had called the huge giant of popular force from its squalid lurking-places, and now he trembled before its presence, and fled from it shrieking, with averted hands. Marat thrust swords into the giant's half-unwilling grasp, and plied him with bloody incitement to slay hip and thigh, and so filled the land with a horror that has not faded from out of men's minds to this day. Danton instantly discerned that the problem was to preserve revolutionary energy, and still to persuade the insurgent forces to retire once more within their boundaries. Robespierre discerned this too, but he was paralysed and bewildered by his own principles, as the convinced doctrinaire is so apt to be amid the perplexities of practice. The teaching of Rousseau was ever pouring like thin smoke among his ideas, and clouding his view of actual conditions. The Tenth of August produced a considerable change in Robespierre's point of view. It awoke him to the precipitous steepness of the slope down which the revolutionary car was rushing headlong. His faith in the infallibility of the people suffered no shock, but he was in a moment alive to the need of walking warily, and his whole march from now until the end, twenty-three months later, became timorous, cunning, and oblique. His intelligence seemed to move in subterranean tunnels, with the gleam of an equivocal premiss at one end, and the mist of a vague conclusion at the other.

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The enthusiastic pedant, with his narrow understanding, his thin purism, and his idyllic sentimentalism, found that the summoning archangel of his paradise proved to be a ruffian with a pike. The shock must have been tremendous. Robespierre did not quail nor retreat; he only revised his notion of the situation. A curious interview once took place between him and Marat. Robespierre began by assuring the Friend of the People that he quite understood the atrocious demands for blood with which the columns of Marat's newspaper were filled, to be merely useful exaggerations of his real designs. Marat repelled the disparaging imputation of clemency and common sense, and talked in his familiar vein of poniarding brigands, burning despots alive in their palaces, and impaling the traitors of the Assembly on their own benches. 'Robespierre,' says Marat, 'listened to me with affright; he turned pale and said nothing. The interview confirmed the opinion I had always had of him, that he united the integrity of a thoroughly honest man and the zeal of a good patriot, with the enlightenment of a wise senator, but that he was without either the views or the audacity of a real statesman.' The picture is instructive, for it shows us Robespierre's invariable habit of leaving violence and iniquity unrebuked; of conciliating the practitioners of violence and iniquity; and of contenting himself with an inward hope of turning the world into a right course by fine words. He had no audacity in Marat's sense, but he was no coward. He knew, as all these men knew, that almost from hour to hour he carried his life in his hand, yet he declined to seek shelter in the obscurity which saved such men as Sieyès. But if he had courage, he had not the initiative of a man of action. He invented none of the ideas or methods of the Revolution, not even the Reign of Terror, but he was very dexterous in accepting or appropriating what more audacious spirits than himself had devised and enforced. The pedant, cursed with the ambition to be a ruler of men, is a curious study. He would be glad not to go too far, and yet his chief dread is lest he be left behind. His consciousness of pure aims allows him to become an accomplice in the worst crimes. Suspecting himself at bottom to be a theorist, he hastens to clear his character as man of practice by conniving at an enormity. Thus, in September 1792, a band of miscreants committed the grievous massacres in the prisons of Paris. Robespierre, though the best evidence goes to show that he not only did not abet the prison murders, but in his heart deplored them, yet after the event did not scruple to justify what had been done. This was the beginning of a long course of compliance with sanguinary misdeeds, for which Robespierre has been as hotly execrated as if he prompted them. We do not, for the moment, measure the relative degrees of guilt that attached to mere compliance on the one hand, and cruel origination on the other. But his position in the Revolution is not rightly understood, unless we recognise him as being in almost every case an accessory after the fact.

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Between the fall of Lewis in 1792 and the fall of Robespierre in 1794, France was the scene of two main series of events. One set comprises the repulse of the invaders, the suppression of an extensive civil war, and the attempted reconstruction of a social framework. The other comprises the rapid phases of an internecine struggle of violent and short-lived factions. By an unhappy fatality, due partly to anti-democratic prejudice, and partly to men's unflinching passion for melodrama, the Reign of Terror has been popularly taken for the central and most important part of the revolutionary epic. This is nearly as absurd as it would be to make Gustave Flourens' manifestation of the Fifth of October, or the rising of the Thirty-first of October, the most prominent features in a history of the war of French defence in our own day. In truth, the Terror was a mere episode; and just as the rising of October 1870 was due to Marshal Bazaine's capitulation at Metz, it is easy to see that, with one exception, every violent movement in Paris, from 1792 to 1794, was due to menace or disaster on the frontier. Every one of the famous days of Paris was an answer to some enemy without. The storm of the Tuileries on the Tenth of August, as we have already said, was the response to Brunswick's proclamation. The bloody days of September were the reaction of panic at the capture of Longwy and Verdun by the Prussians. The surrender of Cambrai provoked the execution of Marie Antoinette. The defeat of Aix-la-

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Chapelle produced the abortive insurrection of the Tenth of March; and the treason of Dumouriez, the reverses of Custine, and the rebellion in La Vendée, produced the effectual insurrection of the Thirty-first of May 1793. The last of these two risings of Paris, headed by the Commune, against the Convention which was until then controlled by the Girondins, at length gave the government of France and the defence of the Revolution definitely over to the Jacobins. Their patriotic dictatorship lasted unbroken for a short period of ten months, and then the great party broke up into factions. The splendid triumphs of the dictatorship have been, in England at any rate, too usually forgotten, and only the crimes of the factions remembered. Robespierre's history unfortunately belongs to the less important battle.

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II

The Girondins were driven out of the Convention by the insurgent Parisians at the beginning of June 1793. The movement may be roughly compared to that of the Independents in our own Rebellion, when the army compelled the withdrawal of eleven of the Presbyterian leaders from the parliament; or, it may recall Pride's memorable Purge of the same famous assembly. Both cases illustrate the common truth that large deliberative bodies, be they never so excellent for purposes of legislation, and even for a general control of the executive government in ordinary times, are found to be essentially unfit for directing a military crisis. If there are any historic examples that at first seem to contradict such a proposition, it will be found that the bodies in question were close aristocracies, like the Great Council of Venice, or the Senate of Rome in the strong days of the Commonwealth; they were never the creatures of popular election, with varying aims and a diversified political spirit. Modern publicists have substituted the divine right of assemblies for the old divine right of monarchies. Those who condone the violence done to the King on the Tenth of August, and even acquiesce in his execution five months afterwards, are relentless against the violence done to the Convention on the Thirty-first of May. We confess ourselves unable to follow this transfer of the superstition of sacrosanctity from a king to a chamber. No doubt, the sooner a nation acquires a settled government, the better for it, provided the government be efficient. But if it be not efficient, the mischief of actively suppressing it may well be fully outweighed by the mischief of retaining it. We have no wish to smooth over the perversities of a revolutionary time; they cost a nation very dear; but if all the elements of the state are in furious convulsion and uncontrollable effervescence, then it is childish to measure the march of events by the standard of happier days of social peace and political order. The prospect before France at the violent close of Girondin supremacy was as formidable as any nation has ever yet had to confront in the history of the world. Rome was not more critically placed when the defeat of Varro on the plain of Cannæ had broken up her alliances and ruined her army. The brave patriots of the Netherlands had no gloomier outlook at that dolorous moment when the Prince of Orange had left them, and Alva had been appointed to bring them back by rapine, conflagration, and murder, under the loathed yoke of the Spanish tyrant.

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Let us realise the conditions that Robespierre and Danton and the other Jacobin leaders had now to face. In the north-west one division of the fugitive Girondins was forming an army at Caen; in the south-west another division was doing the same at Bordeaux. Marseilles and Lyons were rallying all the disaffected and reactionary elements in the south-east. La Vendée had flamed out in wild rebellion for Church and King. The strong places on the north frontier, and the strong places on the east, were in the hands of the foreign enemy. The fate of the Revolution lay in the issue of a struggle between Paris, with less than a score of departments on her side, and all the rest of France and the whole European coalition marshalled against her. And even this was not the worst. In Paris itself a very considerable proportion of its half-million of inhabitants were disaffected to the revolutionary cause. Reactionary historians dwell on the fact that such risings as that of the Tenth of August were devised by no more than half of the sections into which Paris was divided. It was common, they say, for half a dozen individuals to take upon themselves to represent the fourteen or fifteen hundred other members of a section. But what better proof can we have that if France was to be delivered from restored feudalism and foreign spoliation, the momentous task must be performed by those who had sense to discern the awful peril, and energy to encounter it?

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The Girondins had made their incapacity plain. The execution of the King had filled them with alarm, and with hatred against the ruder and more robust party who had forced that startling act of vengeance upon them. Puny social disgusts prevented them from co-operating with Danton or with Robespierre. Prussia and Austria were not more redoubtable or more hateful to them than was Paris, and they wasted, in futile recriminations about the September massacres or the alleged peculations of municipal officers, the time and the energy that should have been devoted without let or interruption to the settlement of the administration and the repulse of the foe. It is impossible to think of such fine characters as Vergniaud or Madame Roland without admiration, or of their untimely fate without pity. But the deliverance of a people beset by strong and implacable enemies could not wait on mere good manners and fastidious sentiments, when these comely things were in company with the most stupendous want of foresight ever shown by a political party. How can we measure the folly of men who so missed the conditions of the problem as to cry out in the Convention itself, almost within earshot of the Jacobin Club, that if any insult were offered to the national representation, the departments would rise, 'Paris would be annihilated; and men would come to search on the banks of the Seine whether such a city had ever existed!' It was to no purpose that Danton urgently rebuked the senseless animosity with which the Right poured incessant malediction on the Left, and the wild shrieking hate with which the Left retaliated on the Right. The battle was to the death, and it was the Girondins who first

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menaced their political foes with vengeance and the guillotine. As it happened, the treason of Dumouriez and their own ineptitude destroyed them before revenge was within reach. Such a consummation was fortunate for their country. It was the Girondins whose want of union and energy had by the middle of 1793 brought France to distraction and imminent ruin. It was a short year of Jacobin government that by the summer of 1794 had welded the nation together again, and finally conquered the invasion. The city of the Seine had once more shown itself what it had been for nine centuries, ever since the days of Odo, Count of Paris and first King of the French, not merely a capital, but France itself, 'its living heart and surest bulwark.'

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The immediate instrument of so rapid and extraordinary an achievement was the Committee of Public Safety. The French have never shown their quick genius for organisation with more triumphant vigour. While the Girondins were still powerful, nine members of the Convention had been constituted an executive committee, April 6, 1793. They were in fact a kind of permanent cabinet, with practical irresponsibility. In the summer of 1793 the number was increased from nine to twelve, and these twelve were the centre of the revolutionary government. They fell into three groups. First, there were the scientific or practical administrators, of whom the most eminent was Carnot. Next came the directors of internal policy, the pure revolutionists, headed by Billaud de Varennes. Finally, there was a trio whose business it was to translate action into the phrases of revolutionary policy. This famous group was Robespierre, Couthon, and Saint Just.

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Besides the Committee of Public Safety there was another chief governmental committee, that of General Security. Its functions were mainly connected with the police, the arrests, and the prisons, but in all serious affairs the two Committees deliberated in common. There were also fourteen other groups of various size, taken from the Convention; they applied themselves with admirable zeal, and usually not with more zeal than skill, to schemes of public instruction, of finance, of legislation, of the administration of justice, and a host of other civil reforms, of all of which Napoleon Bonaparte was by and by to reap the credit. These bodies completed the civil revolution, which the Constituent and the Legislative Assemblies had left so mischievously incomplete that, as soon as ever the Convention had assembled, it was besieged by a host of petitioners praying them to explain and to pursue the abolition of the old feudal rights. Everything had still been left uncertain in men's minds, even upon that greatest of all the revolutionary questions. The feudal division of the committee of general legislation had in this eleventh hour to decide innumerable issues, from those of the widest practical importance, down to the prayer of a remote commune to be relieved from the charge of maintaining a certain mortuary lamp which had been a matter of seignorial obligation. The work done by the radical jurisconsults was never undone. It was the great and durable reward of the struggle. And we have to remember that these industrious and efficient bodies, as well as all other public bodies and functionaries whatever, were placed by the definite revolutionary constitution of 1793 under the direct orders of the Committee of Public Safety.

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It is hardly possible even now for any one who exults in the memory of the great deliverance of a brilliant and sociable people, to stand unmoved before the walls of that palace which Philibert Delorme reared for Catherine de' Medici, and which was thrown into ruin by the madness of a band of desperate men in our own days. Lewis had walked forth from the Tuileries on the fatal morning of the Tenth of August, holding his children by the hand, and lightly noticing, as he traversed the gardens, how early that year the leaves were falling. Lewis had by this time followed the fallen leaves into nothingness. The palace of the kings was now styled the Palace of the Nation, and the new republic carried on its work surrounded by the outward associations of the old monarchy. The Convention after the spring of 1793 held its sittings in what had formerly been the palace theatre. Fierce men from the Faubourgs of St. Antoine and St. Marceau, and fiercer women from the markets, shouted savage applause or menace from galleries, where not so long ago the Italian buffoons had amused the perpetual leisure of the finest ladies and proudest grandes of France. The Committee of General Security occupied the Pavillon de Marsan, looking over a dingy space that the conqueror at Rivoli afterwards made the most dazzling street in Europe. The Committee of Public Safety sat in the Pavillon de Flore, at the opposite end of the Tuileries on the river bank. The approaches were protected by guns and by a bodyguard, while inside there flitted to and fro a cloud of familiars, who have been compared by the enemies of the great Committee to the mutes of the court of the Grand Turk. Any one who had business with this awful body had to grope his way along gloomy corridors, that were dimly lighted by a single lamp at either end. The room in which the Committee sat round a table of green cloth was incongruously gay with the clocks, the bronzes, the mirrors, the tapestries, of the ruined court. The members met at eight in the morning and worked until one; from one to four they attended the sitting of the Convention. In the evening they met again, and usually sat until night was far advanced. It was no wonder if their hue became cadaverous, their eyes hollow and bloodshot, their brows stern, their glance preoccupied and sinister. Between ten and eleven every evening a sombre piece of business was transacted, which has half effaced in the memory of posterity all the heroic industry of the rest of the twenty-four hours. It was then that Fouquier-Tinville, the public prosecutor, brought an account of his day's labour; how the revolutionary tribunal was working, how many had been convicted and how many acquitted, how large or how small had been the batch of the guillotine since the previous night. Across the breadth of the gardens, beyond their trees and fountains, stood the Monster itself, with its cruel symmetry, its colour as of the blood of the dead, its unheeding knife, neutral as the Fates.

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Robespierre has been held responsible for all the violences of the revolutionary government, and his position on the Committee appeared to be exceedingly strong. It was, however, for a long time much less strong in reality than it seemed: all depended upon successfully playing off one force against another, and at the same time maintaining himself at the centre of the see-saw. Robespierre was the literary and rhetorical member of the band; he was the author of the strident manifestoes in which Europe listened with exasperation to the audacious hopes and unflinching purpose of the new France. This had the effect of investing him in the eyes of foreign nations with supreme and undisputed authority over the government. The truth is, that Robespierre was both disliked and despised by his colleagues. They thought of him as a mere maker of useful phrases; he in turn secretly looked down upon them, as the man who has a doctrine and a system in his head always looks down upon the man who lives from hand to mouth. If the Committee had been in the place of a government which has no opposition to fear, Robespierre would have been one of its least powerful members. But although the government was strong, there were at least three potent elements of opposition even within the ranks of the dominant revolutionary party itself.

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Three bodies in Paris were, each of them, the centre of an influence that might at any moment become the triumphant rival of the Committee of Public Safety. These bodies were, first, the Convention; second, the Commune of Paris; and thirdly, the Jacobin Club. The jealousy thus existing outside the Committee would have made any failure instantly destructive. At one moment, at the end of 1793, it was only the surrender of Toulon that saved the Committee from a hostile motion in the Convention, and such a motion would have sent half of them to the guillotine. They were reviled by the extreme party who ruled at the Town Hall for not carrying the policy of extermination far enough. They were reproached by Danton and his powerful section for carrying that policy too far. They were discredited by the small band of intriguers, like Bazire, who identified government with speculation. Finally, they were haunted by the shadow of a fear, which events were by and by to prove only too substantial, lest one of their military agents on the frontier should make himself their master. The key to the struggle of the factions between the winter of 1793 and the revolution of the summer of 1794 is the vigorous resolve of the governing Committees not to part with power. The drama is one of the most exciting in the history of faction; it abounds in rapid turns and unexpected shifts, upon which the student may spend many a day and many a night, and after all he is forced to leave off in despair of threading an accurate way through the labyrinth of passion and intrigue. The broad traits of the situation, however, are tolerably simple. The difficulty was to find a principle of government which the people could be induced to accept. 'The rights of men and the new principles of liberty and equality,' Burke said, 'were very unhandy instruments for those who wished to establish a system of tranquillity and order. The factions,' he added with fierce sarcasm, 'were to accomplish the purposes of order, morality, and submission to the laws, from the principles of atheism, profligacy, and sedition. They endeavoured to establish distinctions, by the belief of which they hoped to keep the spirit of murder safely bottled up and sealed for their own purposes, without endangering themselves by the fumes of the poison which they prepared for their enemies.' This is a ferocious and passionate version, but it is substantially not an unreal account of the position.

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Upon one point all parties agreed, and that was the necessity of founding the government upon force, and force naturally meant Terror. Their plea was that of Dido to Ilioneus and the stormbeaten sons of Dardanus, when they complained that her people had drawn the sword upon them, and barbarously denied the hospitality of the sandy shore:—

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Res dura et regni novitas me talia cogunt Moliri.

And that pithy chapter in Machiavelli's *Prince* which treats of cruelty and clemency, and whether it be better to be loved or feared, anticipates the defence of the Terrorists, in the maxim that for a new prince it is impossible to avoid the name of cruel, because all new states abound in many perils. The difference arose on the question when Terror should be considered to have done as much of its work as it could be expected to do. This difference again was connected with difference of conception as to the type of the society which was ultimately to emerge from the existing chaos. Billaud-Varenes, the guiding spirit of the Committees, was without any conception of this kind. He was a man of force pure and simple. Danton was equally untouched by dreams of social transformation; his philosophy, so far as he had a definite philosophy, was, in spite of one or two inconsistent utterances, materialistic: and materialism, when it takes root in a sane, perspicacious, and indulgent character, as in the case of Danton, and, to take a better-known example, in the case of Jefferson, usually leads to a sound and positive theory of politics; chimeras have no place in it, though a rational social hope has the first place of all. Neither Danton nor Billaud expected a millennium; their only aim was to shape France into a coherent political personality, and the war between them turned upon the policy of prolonging the Terror after the frontiers had been saved and the risings in the provinces put down. There were, however, two parties who took the literature of the century in earnest; they thought that the hour had struck for translating, one of them, the sentimentalism of Rousseau, the other of them, the rationality of Voltaire and Diderot, into terms of politics that should form the basis of a new social life. The strife between the faction of Robespierre and the faction of Chaumette was the reproduction, under the shadow of the guillotine, of the great literary strife of a quarter of a century before between Jean Jacques and the writers whom he contemptuously styled Holbachians. The battle of the books had become a battle between bands of infuriated men. The struggle between Hébert and Chaumette and the Common Council of Paris on the one part, and the Committee and Robespierre on the other, was the concrete form of the deepest controversy that lies before modern society. Can the social union subsist without a belief in God? Chaumette

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answered Yes, and Robespierre cried No. Robespierre followed Rousseau in thinking that any one who should refuse to recognise the existence of a God, should be exiled as a monster devoid of the faculties of virtue and sociability. Chaumette followed Diderot, and Diderot told Samuel Romilly in 1783 that belief in God, as well as submission to kings, would be at an end all over the world in a very few years. The Hébertists might have taken for their motto Diderot's shocking couplet, if they could have known it, about using

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Les entrailles du prêtre
Au défaut d'un cordon pour étrangler les rois.

The theists and the atheists, Chaumette and Robespierre, each of them accepted the doctrine that it was in the power of the armed legislator to impose any belief and any rites he pleased upon the country at his feet. The theism or the atheism of the new France depended, as they thought, on the issue of the war for authority between the Hébertists in the Common Council of Paris, and the Committee of Public Safety. That was the religious side of the attitude of the government to the opposition, and it is the side that possesses most historic interest. Billaud cared very little for religion in any way; his quarrel with the Commune and with Hébert was political. What Robespierre's drift appears to have been, was to use the political animosity of the Committee as a means of striking foes, against whom his own animosity was not only political but religious also.

It would doubtless show a very dull apprehension of the violence and confusion of the time, to suppose that even Robespierre, with all his love for concise theories, was accustomed to state his aim to himself with the definite neatness in which it appears when reduced to literary statement. Pedant as he was, he was yet enough of a politician to see the practical urgency of restoring material order, whatever spiritual belief or disbelief might accompany it. The prospect of a rallying point for material order was incessantly changing; and Robespierre turned to different quarters in search of it almost from week to week. He was only able to exert a certain limited authority over his colleagues in the government, by virtue of his influence over the various sections of possible opposition, and this was a moral, and not an official, influence. It was acquired not by marked practical gifts, for in truth Robespierre did not possess them, but by his good character, by his rhetoric, and by the skill with which he kept himself prominently before the public eye. The effective seat of his power, notwithstanding many limits and incessant variations, was the Jacobin Club. There a speech from him threw his listeners into ecstasies, that have been disrespectfully compared to the paroxysms of Jansenist convulsionaries, or the hysterics of Methodist negroes on a cotton plantation. We naturally think of those grave men who a few years before had founded the republic in America. Jefferson served with Washington in the Virginian legislature and with Franklin in Congress, and he afterwards said that he never heard either of them speak ten minutes at a time; while John Adams declared that he never heard Jefferson utter three sentences together. Of Robespierre it is stated on good authority that for eighteen months there was not a single evening on which he did not make to the assembled Jacobins at least one speech, and that never a short one.

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Strange as it may seem, Robespierre's credit with this grim assembly was due to his truly Philistine respectability and to his literary faculty. He figured as the philosopher and bookman of the party: the most iconoclastic politicians are usually willing to respect the scholar, provided they are sure of his being on their side. Robespierre had from the first discountenanced the fantastic caprices of some too excitable allies. He distrusted the noisy patriots of the middle class, who carried favour with the crowd by clothing themselves in coarse garments, clutching a pike, and donning the famous cap of red woollen, which had been the emblem of the emancipation of a slave in ancient Rome. One night at the Jacobin Club, Robespierre mounted the tribune, dressed with his usual elaborate neatness, and still wearing powder in his hair. An onlooker unceremoniously planted on the orator's head the red cap demanded by revolutionary etiquette. Robespierre threw the sacred symbol on the ground with a severe air, and then proceeded with a discourse of much austerity. Not that he was averse to a certain seemly decoration, or to the embodiment of revolutionary sentiment by means of a symbolism that strikes our cooler imagination as rather puerile. He was as ready as others to use the arts of the theatre for the liturgy of patriots. One of the most touching of all the minor dramatic incidents of the Revolution was the death of Barra. This was a child of thirteen who enrolled himself as a drummer, and marched with the Blues to suppress the rebel Whites in La Vendée. One day he advanced too close to the enemy's post, intrepidly beating the charge. He was surrounded, but the peasant soldiers were loth to strike, 'Cry *Long live the King!*' they shouted, 'or else death!' 'Long live the Republic!' was the poor little hero's answer, as a ball pierced his heart. Robespierre described the incident to the Convention, and amid prodigious enthusiasm demanded that the body of the young martyr of liberty should be transported to the Pantheon with special pomp, and that David, the artist of the Revolution, should be charged with the duty of devising and embellishing the festival. As it happened, the arrangements were made for the ceremony to take place on the Tenth of Thermidor—a day on which Robespierre and all Paris were concerned about a celebration of bloodier import. Thermidor, however, was still far off; and the red sun of Jacobin enthusiasm seemed as if it would shine unclouded for ever.

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Even at the Jacobins, however, popular as he was, Robespierre felt every instant the necessity of walking cautiously. He was as far removed as possible from that position of Dictator which some historians with a wearisome iteration persist in ascribing to him, even at the moment when they are enumerating the defeats which the party of Hébert was able to inflict upon him in the very bosom of the Mother Club itself. They make him the sanguinary dictator in one sentence, and the

humiliated intriguer in the next. The latter is much the more correct account of the two, if we choose to call a man an intriguer who was honestly anxious to suppress what he considered a wicked faction, and yet had need of some dexterity to keep his own head upon his shoulders.

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In the winter of 1793 the Municipal party, guided by Hébert and Chaumette, made their memorable attempt to extirpate Christianity in France. The doctrine of D'Holbach's supper-table had for a short space the arm of flesh and the sword of the temporal power on its side. It was the first appearance of dogmatic atheism in Europe as a political force. This makes it one of the most remarkable moments in the Revolution, just as it makes the Revolution itself the most remarkable moment in modern history. The first political demonstration of atheism was attended by some of the excesses, the folly, the extravagances that stained the growth of Christianity. On the whole it is a very mild story compared with the atrocities of the Jewish records or the crimes of Catholicism. The worst charge against the party of Chaumette is that they were intolerant, and the charge is deplorably true; but this charge cannot lie in the mouth of persecuting churches.

Historical recriminations, however, are not very edifying. It is perfectly fair when Catholics talk of the atheist Terror, to rejoin that the retainers of Anjou and Montpensier slew more men and women on the first day of the Saint Bartholomew than perished in Paris through the Years I. and II. But the retort does us no good beyond the region of dialectic; it rather brings us down to the level of the poor sectaries whom it crushes. Let us raise ourselves into clearer air. The fault of the atheist is that they knew no better than to borrow the maxims of the churchmen; and even those who agree with the dogmatic denials of the atheists—if such there be—ought yet to admit that the mere change from superstition to reason is a small gain, if the conclusions of reason are still to be enforced by the instruments of superstition. Our opinions are less important than the spirit and temper with which they possess us, and even good opinions are worth very little unless we hold them in a broad, intelligent, and spacious way. Now some of the opinions of Chaumette were full of enlightenment and hope. He had a generous and vivid faith in humanity, and he showed the natural effect of abandoning belief in another life by his energetic interest in arrangements for improving the lot of man in this life. But it would be far better to share the superstitious opinions of a virtuous and benignant priest like the Bishop in Victor Hugo's *Misérables*, than to hold those good opinions of Chaumette as he held them, with a rancorous intolerance, a reckless disregard of the rights and feelings of others, and a shallow forgetfulness of all that great and precious part of our natures that lies out of the immediate domain of the logical understanding. One can understand how an honest man would abhor the darkness and tyranny of the Church. But then to borrow the same absolutism in the interests of new light, was inevitably to bring the new light into the same abhorrence as had befallen the old system of darkness. And this is exactly what happened. In every family where a mother sought to have her child baptized, or where sons and daughters sought to have the dying spirit of the old consoled by the last sacrament, there sprang up a bitter enemy to the government which had closed the churches and proscribed the priests.

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How could a society whose spiritual life had been nourished in the solemn mysticism of the Middle Ages, suddenly turn to embrace a gaudy paganism? The common self-respect of humanity was outraged by apostate priests who, whether under the pressure of fear of Chaumette, or in a very superfluity of folly and ecstasy of degradation, hastened to proclaim the charlatanism of their past lives, as they filed before the Convention, led by the Archbishop of Paris, and accompanied by rude acolytes bearing piles of the robes and the vessels of silver and gold with which they had once served their holy offices. 'Our enemies,' Voltaire had said, 'have always on their side the fat of the land, the sword, the strong box, and the *canaille*.' For a moment all these forces were on the other side, and it is deplorable to think that they were as much abused by their new masters as by the old. The explanation is that the destructive party had been brought up in the schools of the ecclesiastical party, and their work was a mere outbreak of mutiny, not a grave and responsible attempt to lead France to a worthier faith. If, as Chaumette believed, mankind are the only Providence of men, surely in that faith more than in any other are we bound to be very solicitous not to bring the violent hand of power on any of the spiritual acquisitions of the race, and very patient in dealing with the slowness of the common people to leave their outworn creeds.

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Instead of defying the Church by the theatrical march of the Goddess of Reason under the great sombre arches of the Cathedral of Our Lady, Chaumette should have found comfort in a firm calculation of the conditions. 'You,' he might have said to the priests,—'you have so debilitated the minds of men and women by your promises and your dreams, that many a generation must come and go before Europe can throw off the yoke of your superstition. But we promise you that they shall be generations of strenuous battle. We give you all the advantages that you can get from the sincerity and pious worth of the good and simple among you. We give you all that the bad among you may get by resort to the poisoned weapons of your profession and its traditions,—its bribes to mental indolence, its hypocritical affectations in the pulpit, its tyranny in the closet, its false speciousness in the world, its menace at the deathbed. With all these you may do your worst, and still humanity will escape you; still the conscience of the race will rise away from you; still the growth of brighter ideals and a nobler purpose will go on, leaving ever further and further behind them your dwarfed finality and leaden moveless stereotype. We shall pass you by on your flank; your fieriest darts will only spend themselves on air. We will not attack you as Voltaire did; we will not exterminate you; we shall explain you. History will place your dogma in

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its class, above or below a hundred competing dogmas, exactly as the naturalist classifies his species. From being a conviction, it will sink to a curiosity; from being the guide to millions of human lives, it will dwindle down to a chapter in a book. As History explains your dogma, so Science will dry it up; the conception of law will silently make the conception of the daily miracle of your altars seem impossible; the mental climate will gradually deprive your symbols of their nourishment, and men will turn their backs on your system, not because they have confuted it, but because, like witchcraft or astrology, it has ceased to interest them. The great ship of your Church, once so stout and fair and well laden with good destinies, is become a skeleton ship; it is a phantom hulk, with warped planks and sere canvas, and you who work it are no more than ghosts of dead men, and at the hour when you seem to have reached the bay, down your ship will sink like lead or like stone to the deepest bottom.'

Alas, the speculation of the century had not rightly attuned men's minds to this firm confidence in the virtue of liberty, sounding like a bell through all distractions. None of these high things were said. The temples were closed, the sacred symbols defiled, the priests maltreated, the worshippers dispersed. The Commune of Paris imitated the policy of the King of France who revoked the Edict of Nantes, and democratic atheism parodied the dragonnades of absolutist Catholicism.

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Robespierre was unutterably outraged by the proceedings of the atheists. They perplexed him as a politician intent upon order, and they afflicted him sorely as an ardent disciple of the Savoyard Vicar. Hébert, however, was so strong that it needed some courage to attack him, nor did Robespierre dare to withstand him to the face. But he did not flinch from making an energetic assault upon atheism and the excesses of its partisans. His admirers usually count his speech of the Twenty-first of November one of the most admirable of his oratorical successes. The Sphinx still sits inexorable at our gates, and his words have lost none of their interest. 'Every philosopher and every individual,' he said, 'may adopt whatever opinion he pleases about atheism. Any one who wishes to make such an opinion into a crime is an insensate; but the public man or the legislator who should adopt such a system, would be a hundred times more insensate still. The National Convention abhors it. The Convention is not the author of a scheme of metaphysics. It was not to no purpose that it published the Declaration of the Rights of Man in presence of the Supreme Being. I shall be told perhaps that I have a narrow intelligence, that I am a man of prejudice, and a fanatic. I have already said that I spoke neither as an individual nor as a philosopher with a system, but as a representative of the people. *Atheism is aristocratic. The idea of a great being who watches over oppressed innocence and punishes triumphant crime is essentially the idea of the people.* This is the sentiment of Europe and the Universe; it is the sentiment of the French nation. That people is attached neither to priests, nor to superstition, nor to ceremonies; it is attached only to worship in itself, or in other words to the idea of an incomprehensible Power, the terror of wrongdoers, the stay and comfort of virtue, to which it delights to render words of homage that are all so many anathemas against injustice and triumphant crime.'

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This is Robespierre's favourite attitude, the priest posing as statesman. Like others, he declares the Supreme Power incomprehensible, and then describes him in terms of familiar comprehension. He first declares atheism an open choice, and then he brands it with the most odious epithet in the accepted vocabulary of the hour. Danton followed practically the same line, though saying much less about it. 'If Greece,' he said in the Convention, 'had its Olympian games, France too shall solemnise her sans-culottid days. The people will have high festivals; they will offer incense to the Supreme Being, to the master of nature; for we never intended to annihilate the reign of superstition in order to set up the reign of atheism.... If we have not honoured the priest of error and fanaticism, neither do we wish to honour the priest of incredulity: we wish to serve the people. I demand that there shall be an end of these anti-religious masquerades in the Convention.'

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There was an end of the masquerading, but the Hébertists still kept their ground. Danton, Robespierre, and the Committee were all equally impotent against them for some months longer. The revolutionary force had been too strong to be resisted by any government since the Paris insurgents had carried both King and Assembly in triumph from Versailles in the October of 1789. It was now too strong for those who had begun to strive with all their might to build a new government out of the agencies that had shattered the old to pieces. For some months the battle which had been opened by Robespierre's remonstrance against atheistic intolerance, degenerated into a series of masked skirmishes. The battle-ground of rival principles was overshadowed by the baleful wings of the genius of demonic Hate. *Vexilla regis prodeunt inferni*; the banners of the King of the Pit came forth. The scene at the Cordeliers for a time became as frantic as a Council of the Early Church settling the true composition of the Holy Trinity. Or it recalls the fierce and bloody contentions between Demos and Oligarchy in an old Greek town. We think of the day in the harbour of Corcyra when the Athenian admiral who had come to deliver the people, sailed out to meet the Spartan enemy, and on turning round to see if his Corcyrean allies were following, saw them following indeed, but the crew of every ship striving in enraged conflict with one another. Collot D'Herbois had come back in hot haste from Lyons, where, along with Fouché, he had done his best to carry out the decree of the Convention, that not one stone of the city should be left on the top of another, and that even its very name should cease from the lips of men. Carrier was recalled from Nantes, where his feats of ingenious massacre had rivalled

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the exploits of the cruellest and maddest of the Roman Emperors. The presence of these men of blood gave new courage and resolution to the Hébertists. Though the alliance was informal, yet as against Danton, Camille Desmoulins, and the rest of the Indulgents, as well as against Robespierre, they made common cause.

Camille Desmoulins attacked Hébert in successive numbers of a journal that is perhaps the one truly literary monument of this stage of the revolution. Hébert retaliated by impugning the patriotism of Desmoulins in the Club, and the unfortunate wit, notwithstanding the efforts of Robespierre on his behalf, was for a while turned out of the sacred precincts. The power of the extreme faction was shown in relation to other prominent members of the party whom they loved to stigmatise by the deadly names of Indulgent and Moderantist. Even Danton himself was attacked (December 1793), and the integrity of his patriotism brought into question. Robespierre made an energetic defence of his great rival in the hierarchy of revolution, and the defence saved Danton from the mortal ignominy of expulsion from the communion of the orthodox. On the other hand, Anacharsis Clootz, that guileless ally of the party of delirium, was less fortunate. Robespierre assailed the cosmopolitan for being a German baron, for having four thousand pounds a year, and for striking his sans-culottism some notes higher than the regular pitch. Even M. Louis Blanc calls this an iniquity, and sets it down as the worst page in Robespierre's life. Others have described Robespierre as struck at this time by the dire malady of kings—hatred of the Idea. It seems, however, a hard saying that devotion to the Idea is to extinguish common sense. Clootz, notwithstanding his simple and disinterested character, and his possession of some rays of the modern illumination, was one of the least sane of all the men who in the exultation of their silly gladness were suddenly caught up by that great wheel of fire. All we can say is that Robespierre's bitter demeanour towards Clootz was ungenerous; but then this is only natural in him. Robespierre often clothed cool policy in the semblance of clemency, but I cannot hear in any phrase he ever used, or see in any measure he ever proposed, the mark of true generosity; of kingliness of spirit, not a trace. He had no element of ready and cordial propitiation, an element that can never be wanting in the greatest leaders in time of storm. If he resisted the atrocious proposals to put Madame Elizabeth to death, he was thinking not of mercy or justice, but of the mischievous effect that her execution would have upon the public opinion of Europe, and he was so unmanly as to speak of her as *la méprisable sœur de Louis XVI*. Such a phrase is the disclosure of an abject stratum in his soul.

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Yet this did not prevent him from seeing and denouncing the bloody extravagances of the Proconsuls, the representatives of Parisian authority in the provinces; nor from standing firm against the execution of the Seventy-Three, who had been bold enough to question the purgation of the National Convention on the Thirty-first of May. But the return of Collot d'Herbois made the situation more intricate. Collot was by his position the ally of Billaud, and to attack him, therefore, was to attack the most powerful member of the Committee of Public Safety. Billaud was too formidable. He was always the impersonation of the ruder genius of the Revolution, and the incarnation of the philosophy of the Terror, not as a delirium, but as a piece of deliberate policy. His pale, sober, and concentrated physiognomy seemed a perpetual menace. He had no gifts of speech, but his silence made people shudder, like the silence of the thunder when the tempest rages at its height. It was said by contemporaries that if Vadier was a hyæna, Barère a jackal, and Robespierre a cat, Billaud was a tiger.

The cat perceived that he was in danger of not having the tiger, jackal, and hyæna, on his side. Robespierre, in whom spasmodical courage and timidity ruled by rapid turns, began to suspect that he had been premature; and a convenient illness, which some suppose to have been feigned, excused his withdrawal for some weeks from a scene where he felt that he could no longer see clear. We cannot doubt that both he and Danton were perfectly assured that the anarchic party must unavoidably roll headlong into the abyss. But the hour of doom was uncertain. To make a mistake in the right moment, to hurry the crisis, was instant death. Robespierre was a more adroit calculator than Danton. We must not confound his thin and querulous reserve with that stout and deep-browed patience, which may imply as superb a fortitude, and may demand as much iron control in a statesman, as the most heroic exploits of political energy. But his habit of waiting on force, instead of, like the other, taking the initiative with force, had trained his sight. The mixture of astuteness with his scruple, of egoistic policy with his stiffness for doctrine, gave him an advantage over Danton, that made his life worth exactly three months' more purchase than Danton's. It has been said that Spinozism or Transcendentalism in poetic production becomes Machiavellism in reflection: for the same reasons we may always expect sentimentalism in theory to become under the pressure of action a very self-protecting guile. Robespierre's mind was not rich nor flexible enough for true statesmanship, and it is a grave mistake to suppose that the various cunning tacks in which his career abounds, were any sign of genuine versatility or resource or political growth and expansion. They were, in fact, the resort of a man whose nerves were weaker than his volition. Robespierre was a kind of spinster. Force of head did not match his spiritual ambition. He was not, we repeat, a coward in any common sense; in that case he would have remained quiet among the croaking frogs of the Marsh, and by and by have come to hold a portfolio under the first Consul. He did not fear death, and he envied with consuming envy those to whom nature had given the qualities of initiative. But his nerves always played him false. The consciousness of having to resolve to take a decided step alone, was the precursor of a fit of trembling. His heart did not fail, but he could not control the parched voice, nor the twitching features, not the ghastly palsy of inner misgiving. In this respect Robespierre recalls a more illustrious man; we think of Cicero tremblingly calling upon the Senate to decide for him whether he should order the execution of the Catilinarian conspirators. It is to be said, however, in his favour that he had the art, which Cicero lacked, to hide his pusillanimity. Robespierre knew

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himself, and did his best to keep his own secret.

His absence during the final crisis of the anarchic party allowed events to ripen, without committing him to that initiative in dangerous action which he had dreaded on the Tenth of August, as he dreaded it on every other decisive day of this burning time. The party of the Commune became more and more daring in their invectives against the Convention and the Committees. At length they proclaimed open insurrection. But Paris was cold, and opinion was divided. In the night of the Thirteenth of March, Hébert, Chaumette, Clootz, were arrested. The next day Robespierre recovered sufficiently to appear at the Jacobin Club. He joined his colleagues of the Committee of Public Safety in striking the blow. On the Twenty-fourth of March the Ultra-Revolutionist leaders were beheaded.

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The first bloody breach in the Jacobin ranks was speedily followed by the second. The Right wing of the opposition to the Committee soon followed the Left down the ways to dusty death, and the execution of the Anarchists only preceded by a week the arrest of the Moderates. When the seizure of Danton had once before been discussed in the Committee, Robespierre resisted the proposal violently. We have already seen how he defended Danton at the Jacobin Club, when the Club underwent the process of purification in the winter. What produced this sudden tack? How came Robespierre to assent in March to a violence which he had angrily discountenanced in February? There had been no change in the policy or attitude of Danton himself. The military operations against the domestic and foreign enemies were no sooner fairly in the way of success, than Danton began to meditate in serious earnest the consolidation of a republican system of law and justice. He would fain have stayed the Terror. 'Let us leave something,' he said, 'to the guillotine of opinion.' He aided, no doubt, in the formation of the Revolutionary Tribunal, but this was exactly in harmony with his usual policy of controlling popular violence without alienating the strength of popular sympathy. The process of the tribunal was rough and summary, but it was fairer—until Robespierre's Law of Prairial—than people usually suppose, and it was the very temple of the goddess of Justice herself compared with the September massacres. 'Let us prove ourselves terrible,' Danton said, 'to relieve the people from the necessity of being so.' His activity had been incessant in urging and superintending the great levies against the foreigner; he had gone repeatedly on distant and harassing expeditions, as the representative of the Convention at the camps on the frontier. In the midst of all this he found time to press forward measures for the instruction of the young, and for the due appointment of judges, and his head was full of ideas for the construction of a permanent executive council. It was this which made him eager for a cessation of the method of Terror, and it was this which made the Committee of Public Safety his implacable enemy.

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Why, then, did Robespierre, who also passed as a man of order and humanity, not continue to support Danton after the suppression of the Hébertists, as he had supported him before? The common and facile answer is that he was moved by a malignant desire to put a rival out of the way. On the whole, the evidence seems to support Napoleon's opinion that Robespierre was incapable of voting for the death of anybody in the world on grounds of personal enmity. And his acquiescence in the ruin of Danton is intelligible enough on the grounds of selfish policy. The Committee hated Danton for the good reason that he had openly attacked them, and his cry for clemency was an inflammatory and dangerous protest against their system. Now Robespierre, rightly or wrongly, had made up his mind that the Committee was the instrument by which, and which only, he could work out his own vague schemes of power and reconstruction. And, in any case, how could he resist the Committee? The famous insurrectionary force of Paris, which Danton had been the first to organise against a government, had just been chilled by the fall of the Hébertists. Least of all could this force be relied upon to rise in defence of the very chief whose every word for many weeks past had been a protest against the Communal leaders. In separating himself from the Ultras, Danton had cut off the great reservoir of his peculiar strength.

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It may be said that the Convention was the proper centre of resistance to the designs of the Committee, and that if Danton and Robespierre had united their forces in the Convention they would have defeated Billaud and his allies. This seems to us more than doubtful. The Committee had acquired an immense preponderance over the Convention. They had been eminently successful in the immense tasks imposed upon them. They had the prestige not only of being the government—so great a thing in a country that had just emerged from the condition of a centralised monarchy; they had also the prestige of being a government that had done its work triumphantly. We are now in March. In July we shall find that Robespierre adopted the very policy that we are now discussing, of playing off the Convention against the Committee. In July that policy ended in his headlong fall. Why should it have been any more successful four months earlier?

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What we may say is, that Robespierre was bound in all morality to defend Danton in the Convention at every hazard. Possibly so; but then to run risks for chivalry's sake was not in Robespierre's nature, and no man can climb out beyond the limitations of his own character. His narrow head and thin blood and instable nerve, his calculating humour and his frigid egoism, disinclined him to all games of chance. His apologists have sought to put a more respectable colour on his abandonment of Danton. The precisian, they say, disapproved of Danton's lax and heedless courses. Danton said to him one day:—'What do I care? Public opinion is a strumpet, and posterity a piece of nonsense.' How should the puritanical lawyer endure such cynicism as this? And Danton delighted in inflicting these coarse shocks. Again, Danton had given various gross names of contempt to Saint Just. Was Robespierre not to feel insults offered to the ablest and

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most devoted of his lieutenants? What was more important than all, the acclamations with which the partisans of reaction greeted the fall of the Ultras, made it necessary to give instant and unmistakable notice to the foes of the Revolution that the goddess of the scorching eye and fiery hand still grasped the axe of her vengeance.

These are pleas invented after the fact. All goes to show that Robespierre was really moved by nothing more than his invariable dread of being left behind, of finding himself on the weaker side, of not seeming practical and political enough. And having made up his mind that the stronger party was bent on the destruction of the Dantonists, he became fiercer than Billaud himself. It is constantly seen that the waverer, of nervous atrabiliar constitution, no sooner overcomes the agony of irresolution, than he flings himself on his object with a vindictive tenacity that seems to repay him for all the moral humiliation inflicted on him by his stifled doubts. He redeems the slowness of his approach by the fury of his spring. 'Robespierre,' says M. d'Héricault, 'precipitated himself to the front of the opinion that was yelling against his friends of yesterday. In order to keep his usual post in the van of the Revolution, in order to secure the advantage to his own popularity of an execution which the public voice seemed to demand, he came forward as the author of that execution, though only the day before he had hesitated about its utility, and though it was, in truth far less useful to him than it proved to be to his future antagonists.'

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Robespierre first alarmed Danton's friends by assuming a certain icy coldness of manner, and by some menacing phrases about the faction of the so-called Moderates. Danton had gone, as he often did, to his native village of Arcis-sur-Aube, to seek repose and a little clearness of sight in the night that wrapped him about. He was devoid of personal ambition; he never had any humour for mere factious struggles. His, again, was the temperament of violent force, and in such types the reaction is always tremendous. The indomitable activity of the last twenty months had bred weariness of spirit. The nemesis of a career of strenuous Will in large natures is apt to be a sudden sense of the irony of things. In Danton, as with Byron it happened afterwards, the vehemence of the revolutionary spirit was touched by this desolating irony. His friends tried to rouse him. It is not clear that he could have done anything. The balance of force, after the suppression of the Hébertists, was irretrievably against him, as calculation had already revealed to Robespierre.

There are various stories of the pair having met at dinner almost on the eve of Danton's arrest, and parting with sombre disquietude on both sides. The interview, with its champagne, its interlocutors, its play of sinister repartee, may possibly have taken place, but the alleged details are plainly apocryphal. After all, 'Religion ist in der Thiere Trieb,' says Wallenstein; 'the very savage drinks not with the victim, into whose breast he means to plunge a sword.' Danton was warned that Robespierre was plotting his arrest. 'If I thought he had the bare idea,' said Danton with something of Gargantuan hyperbole, 'I would eat his bowels out.' Such was the disdain with which the 'giant of the mighty bone and bold emprise' thought of our meagre-hearted pedant. The truth is that in the stormy and distracted times of politics, and perhaps in all times, contempt is a dangerous luxury. A man may be a very poor creature, and still have a faculty for mischief. And Robespierre had this faculty in the case of Danton. With singular baseness, he handed over to Saint Just a collection of notes, to serve as material for the indictment which Saint Just was to present to the Convention. They comprised everything that suspicion could interpret malignantly, from the most conspicuous acts of Danton's public life, down to the casual freedom of private discourse.

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Another infamy was to follow. After the arrest, and on the proceedings to obtain the assent of the Convention to the trial of Danton and others of its members, one only of their friends had the courage to rise and demand that they should be heard at the bar. Robespierre burst out in cold rage; he asked whether they had undergone so many heroic sacrifices, counting among them these acts of 'painful severity,' only to fall under the yoke of a band of domineering intriguers; and he cried out impatiently that they would brook no claim of privilege, and suffer no rotten idol. The word was felicitously chosen, for the Convention dreaded to have its independence suspected, and it dreaded this all the more because at this time its independence did not really exist. The vote against Danton was unanimous, and the fact that it was so is the deepest stain on the fame of this assembly. On the afternoon of the Sixteenth Germinal (April 5, 1794) Paris in amazement and some stupefaction saw the once-dreaded Titan of the Mountain fast bound in the tumbrel, and faring towards the sharp-clanging knife. 'I leave it all in a frightful welter,' Danton is reported to have said. 'Not a man of them has an idea of government. Robespierre will follow me; he is dragged down by me. Ah, better be a poor fisherman than meddle with the governing of men!'

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Let us pause for a moment over a calmer reminiscence. This was the very day on which the virtuous and high-minded Condorcet quitted the friendly roof that for nine months had concealed him from the search of proscription. The same week he was found dead in his prison. While Danton was storming with impotent thunder before the tribunal, Condorcet was writing those closing words of his Sketch of Human Progress, which are always so full of strength and edification. 'How this picture of the human race freed from all its fetters,—withdrawn from the empire of chance, as from that of the enemies of progress, and walking with firm and assured step in the way of truth, of virtue, and happiness, presents to the philosopher a sight that consoles him for the errors, the crimes, the injustice, with which the earth is yet stained, and of

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which he is not seldom the victim! It is in the contemplation of this picture that he receives the reward of his efforts for the progress of reason, for the defence of liberty. He ventures to link them with the eternal chain of the destinies of man: it is there he finds the true recompense of virtue, the pleasure of having done a lasting good; fate can no longer undo it, by any disastrous compensation that shall restore prejudice and bondage. This contemplation is for him a refuge, into which the recollection of his persecutors can never follow him; in which, living in thought with man reinstated in the rights and the dignity of his nature, he forgets man tormented and corrupted by greed, by base fear, by envy: it is here that he truly abides with his fellows, in an elysium that his reason has known how to create for itself, and that his love for humanity adorns with all purest delights.'

In following the turns of the drama which was to end in the tragedy of Thermidor, we perceive that after the fall of the anarchists and the death of Danton, the relations between Robespierre and the Committees underwent a change. He, who had hitherto been on the side of government, became in turn an agency of opposition. He did this in the interest of ultimate stability, but the difference between the new position and the old is that he now distinctly associated the idea of a stable republic with the ascendancy of his own religious conceptions. How far the ascendancy of his own personality was involved, we have no means of judging. The vulgar accusation against him is that he now deliberately aimed at a dictatorship, and began to plot with that end in view. It is always the most difficult thing in the world to draw a line between mere arrogant egoism on the one hand, and on the other the identification of a man's personal elevation with the success of his public cause. The two ends probably become mixed in his mind, and if the cause be a good one, it is the height of pharisaical folly to quarrel with him, because he desires that his authority and renown shall receive some of the lustre of a far-shining triumph. What we complain of in Napoleon Bonaparte, for instance, is not that he sought power, but that he sought it in the interests of a coarse, brutal, and essentially unmeaning personal ambition. And so of Robespierre. We need not discuss the charge that he sought to make himself master. The important thing is that his mastery could have served no great end for France; that it would have been like himself, poor, barren, and hopelessly mediocre. And this would have been seen on every side. France had important military tasks to perform before her independence was assured. Robespierre hated war, and was jealous of every victory. France was in urgent need of stable government, of new laws, of ordered institutions. Robespierre never said a word to indicate that he had a single positive idea in his head on any of these great departments. And, more than this, he was incapable of making use of men who were more happily endowed than himself. He had never mastered that excellent observation of De Retz, that of all the qualities of a good party chief, none is so indispensable as being able to suppress on many occasions, and to hide on all, even legitimate suspicions. He was corroded by suspicion, and this paralyses able servants. Finally, Robespierre had no imperial quality of soul, but only that very sorry imitation of it, a lively irritability.

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The base of Robespierre's schemes of social reconstruction now came clearly into view; and what a base! An official Supreme Being, and a regulated Terror. The one was to fill up the spiritual void, and the other to satisfy all the exigencies of temporal things. It is to the credit of Robespierre's perspicacity that he should have recognised the human craving for religion, but this credit is as naught when we contemplate the jejune thing that passed for religion in his dim and narrow understanding. Rousseau had brought a new soul into the eighteenth century by the Savoyard Vicar's Profession of Faith, the most fervid and exalted expression of emotional deism that religious literature contains; vague, irrational, incoherent, cloudy; but the clouds are suffused with glowing gold. When we turn from that to the political version of it in Robespierre's discourse on the relations of religious and moral ideas with republican principles, we feel as one who revisits a landscape that had been made glorious to him by a summer sky and fresh liquid winds from the gates of the evening sun, only to find it dead under a gray heaven and harsh blasts from the northeast. Robespierre's words on the Supreme Being are never a brimming stream of deep feeling; they are a literary concoction: never the self-forgetting expansion of the religious soul, but only the composite of the rhetorician. He thought he had a passion for religion; what he took for religion was little more than mental decorum. We do not mean that he was insincere, or that he was without a feeling for high things. But here, as in all else, his aspiration was far beyond his faculty; he yearned for great spiritual emotions, as he had yearned for great thoughts and great achievements, but his spiritual capacity was as scanty and obscure as his intelligence. And where unkind Nature thus unequally yokes lofty objects in a man with a short mental reach, she stamps him with the very definition of mediocrity.

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How can we speak with decent patience of a man who seriously thought that he should conciliate the conservative and theological elements of the society at his feet, by such an odious opera-piece as the Feast of the Supreme Being? This was designed as a triumphant ripost to the Feast of Reason, which Chaumette and his friends had celebrated in the winter. The energumens of the Goddess of Reason had now been some weeks in their bloody graves; by this time, if they had given the wrong answer to the supreme enigma, their eyes would perhaps be opened. Robespierre persuaded the Convention to decree an official recognition of the Supreme Being, and to attend a commemorative festival in honour of their mystic patron. He contrived to be chosen president for the decade in which the festival would fall. When the day came (20th Prairial, June 8, 1794), he clothed himself with more than even his usual care. As he looked out from the windows of the Tuileries upon the jubilant crowd in the gardens, he was intoxicated with

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enthusiasm. 'O Nature,' he cried, 'how sublime thy power, how full of delight! How tyrants must grow pale at the idea of such a festival as this!' In pontifical pride he walked at the head of the procession, with flowers and wheat-ears in his hand, to the sound of chants and symphonies and choruses of maidens. On the first of the great basins in the gardens, David, the artist, had devised an allegorical structure for which an inauspicious doom was prepared. Atheism, a statue of life size, was throned in the midst of an amiable group of human Vices, with Madness by her side, and Wisdom menacing them with lofty wrath. Great are the perils of symbolism. Robespierre applied a torch to Atheism, but alas, the wind was hostile, or else Atheism and Madness were damp. They obstinately resisted the torch, and it was hapless Wisdom who took fire. Her face, all blackened by smoke, grinned a hideous ghastly grin at her sturdy rivals. The miscarriage of the allegory was an evil omen, and men probably thought how much better the churchmen always managed their conjurings and the art of spectacle. There was a great car drawn by milk-white oxen; in the front were ranged sheaves of golden grain, while at the back shepherds and shepherdesses posed with scenic graces. The whole mummerly was pagan. It was a bringing back of Cerealia and Thesmophoria to earth. It stands as the most disgusting and contemptible anachronism in history.

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The famous republican Calendar, with its Prairials and Germinals, its Ventoses and Pluvioses, was an anachronism of the same kind, though it was less despicable in its manifestation. Its philosophic base was just as retrograde and out of season as the fooleries of the Feast of the Supreme Being. The association of worship and sacredness with the fruits of the earth, with the forces of nature, with the power and variety of the elements, could only be sincere so long as men really thought of all these things as animated each by a special will of its own. Such an association became mere charlatanry, when knowledge once passed into the positive stage. How could men go back to adore an outer world, after they had found out the secret that it is a mere huge group of phenomena, following fixed courses, and not obeying spontaneous and unaccountable volitions of their own? And what could be more puerile than the fanciful connection of the Supreme Being with a pastoral simplicity of life? This simplicity was gone, irrecoverably gone, with the passage from nomad times to the complexities of a modern society. To typify, therefore, the Supreme Being as specially interested in shocks of grain and in shepherds and shepherdesses was to make him a mere figure in an idyll, the ornament of a rural mask, a god of the garden, instead of the sovereign director of the universal forces, and stern master of the destinies of men. Chaumette's commemoration of the Divinity of Reason was a sensible performance, compared with Robespierre's farcical repartee. It was something, as Comte has said, to select for worship man's most individual attribute. If they could not contemplate society as a whole, it was at least a gain to pay homage to that faculty in the human rulers of the world, which had brought the forces of nature—its pluviosity, nivosity, germinality, and vendemiarity—under the yoke for the service of men.

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If the philosophy of Robespierre's pageant was so retrograde and false, its politics were still more inane. It is a monument of presumptuous infatuation that any one should feel so strongly as he did that order could only be restored on condition of coming to terms with religious use and prejudice, and then that he should dream that his Supreme Being—a mere didactic phrase, the deity of a poet's georgic—should adequately replace that eternal marvel of construction, by means of which the great churchmen had wrought dogma and liturgy and priest and holy office into every hour and every mood of men's lives. There is no binding principle of human association in a creed with this one bald article. 'In truth,' as I have said elsewhere of such deism as Robespierre's, 'one can scarcely call it a creed. It is mainly a name for a particular mood of fine spiritual exaltation; the expression of a state of indefinite aspiration and supreme feeling for lofty things. Are you going to convert the new barbarians of our western world with this fair word of emptiness? Will you sweeten the lives of suffering men, and take its heaviness from that droning piteous chronicle of wrong and cruelty and despair, which everlastingly saddens the compassionating ear like moaning of a midnight sea; will you animate the stout of heart with new fire, and the firm of hand with fresh joy of battle, by the thought of a being without intelligible attributes, a mere abstract creation of metaphysic, whose mercy is not as our mercy, nor his justice as our justice, nor his fatherhood as the fatherhood of men? It was not by a cold, a cheerless, a radically depraving conception such as this, that the church became the refuge of humanity in the dark times of old, but by the representation, to men sitting in bondage and confusion, of godlike natures moving among them, under figure of the most eternally touching of human relations,—a tender mother ever interceding for them, and an elder brother laying down his life that their burdens might be loosened.'

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On the day of the Feast of the Supreme Being, the guillotine was concealed in the folds of rich hangings. It was the Twentieth of Prairial. Two days later Couthon proposed to the Convention the memorable Law of the Twenty-second Prairial. Robespierre was the draftsman, and the text of it still remains in his own writing. This monstrous law is simply the complete abrogation of all law. Of all laws ever passed in the world it is the most nakedly iniquitous. Tyrants have often substituted their own will for the ordered procedure of a tribunal, but no tyrant before ever went through the atrocious farce of deliberately making a tribunal the organised negation of security for justice. Couthon laid its theoretic base in a fallacy that must always be full of seduction to shallow persons in authority: 'He who would subordinate the public safety to the inventions of jurisconsults, to the formulas of the Court, is either an imbecile or a scoundrel.' As if public safety could mean anything but the safety of the public. The author of the Law of Prairial had forgotten

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the minatory word of the sage to whom he had gone on a pilgrimage in the days of his youth. 'All becomes legitimate and even virtuous,' Helvétius had written, 'on behalf of the public safety.' Rousseau inscribed on the margin, 'The public safety is nothing, unless individuals enjoy security.' What security was possible under the Law of Prairial?

After the probity and good judgment of the tribunal, the two cardinal guarantees in state trials are accurate definition, and proof. The offence must be capable of precise description, and the proof against an offender must conform to strict rule. The Law of Prairial violently infringed all three of these essential conditions of judicial equity. First, the number of the jury who had power to convict was reduced. Second, treason was made to consist in such vague and infinitely elastic kinds of action as inspiring discouragement, misleading opinion, depraving manners, corrupting patriots, abusing the principles of the Revolution by perfidious applications. Third, proof was to lie in the conscience of the jury; there was an end of preliminary inquiry, of witnesses in defence, and of counsel for the accused. Any kind of testimony was evidence, whether material or moral, verbal or written, if it was of a kind 'likely to gain the assent of a man of reasonable mind.'

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Now what was Robespierre's motive in devising this infernal instrument? The theory that he loved judicial murder for its own sake, can only be held by the silliest of royalist or clerical partisans. It is like the theory of the vulgar kind of Protestantism, that Mary Tudor or Philip of Spain had a keen delight in shedding blood. Robespierre, like Mary and like Philip, would have been as well pleased if all the world would have come round to his mind without the destruction of a single life. The true inquisitor is a creature of policy, not a man of blood by taste. What, then, was the policy that inspired the Law of Prairial? To us the answer seems clear. We know what was the general aim in Robespierre's mind at this point in the history of the Revolution. His brother Augustin was then the representative of the Convention with the army of Italy, and General Bonaparte was on terms of close intimacy with him. Bonaparte said long afterwards, when he was expiating a life of iniquity on the rock of Saint Helena, that he saw long letters from Maximilian to Augustin Robespierre, all blaming the Conventional Commissioners—Tallien, Fouché, Barras, Collot, and the rest—for the horrors they perpetrated, and accusing them of ruining the Revolution by their atrocities. Again, there is abundant testimony that Robespierre did his best to induce the Committee of Public Safety to bring those odious malefactors to justice. The text of the Law itself discloses the same object. The vague phrases of depraving manners and applying revolutionary principles perfidiously, were exactly calculated to smite the band of violent men whose conduct was to Robespierre the scandal of the Revolution. And there was a curious clause in the law as originally presented, which deprived the Convention of the right of preventing measures against its own members. Robespierre's general design in short was to effect a further purgation of the Convention. There is no reason to suppose that he deliberately aimed at any more general extermination. On the other hand, it is incredible that, as some have maintained, he should merely have had in view the equalisation of rich and poor before the tribunals, by withdrawing the aid of counsel and testimony to civic character from both rich and poor alike.

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If Robespierre's design was what we believe it to have been, the result was a ghastly failure. The Committee of Public Safety would not consent to apply his law against the men for whom he had specially designed it. The frightful weapon which he had forged was seized by the Committee of General Security, and Paris was plunged into the fearful days of the Great Terror. The number of persons put to death by the Revolutionary Tribunal before the Law of Prairial had been comparatively moderate. From the creation of the tribunal in April 1793, down to the execution of the Hébertists in March 1794, the number of persons condemned to death was 505. From the death of the Hébertists down to the death of Robespierre, the number of the condemned was 2158. One half of the entire number of victims, namely, 1356, were guillotined after the Law of Prairial. No deadlier instrument was ever invented by the cruelty of man. Innocent women no less than innocent men, poor no less than rich, those in whom life was almost spent, no less than those in whom its pulse was strongest, virtuous no less than vicious, were sent off in woe-stricken batches all those summer days. A man was informed against; he was seized in his bed at five in the morning; at seven he was taken to the Conciergerie; at nine he received information of the charge against him; at ten he went into the dock; by two in the afternoon he was condemned; by four his head lay in the executioner's basket.

What stamps the system of the Terror at this date with a wickedness that cannot be effaced, is that at no moment was the danger from foreign or domestic foe less serious. We may always forgive something to well-grounded panic. The proscriptions of an earlier date in Paris were not excessively sanguinary, if we remember that the city abounded in royalists and other reactionists, who were really dangerous in fomenting discouragement and spreading confusion. If there ever is an excuse for martial law, and it must be rare, the French government were warranted in resorting to it in 1793. Paris in those days was like a city beleaguered, and the world does not use very harsh words about the commandant of a besieged town who puts to death traitors found within his walls. Opinion in England at this very epoch encouraged the Tory government to pass a Treason Bill, which introduced as vague a definition of treasonable offence as even the Law of Prairial itself. Windham did not shrink from declaring in parliament that he and his colleagues were determined to exact 'a rigour beyond the law.' And they were as good as their word. The Jacobins had no monopoly either of cruel law or cruel breach of law in the eighteenth century. Only thirty years before, opinion in Pennsylvania had prompted a hideous massacre of harmless Indians as a deed acceptable to God, and the grandson of William Penn proclaimed a bounty of fifty dollars for the scalp of a female Indian, and three times as much for a male. A man would have had quite as good a chance of justice from the Revolutionary Tribunal, as at the hands of

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Braxfield, the Scotch judge, who condemned Muir and Palmer for sedition in 1793, and who told the government, with a brazen front worthy of Carrier or Collot d'Herbois themselves, that, if they would only send him prisoners, he would find law for them.

We have no sympathy with the spirit of paradox that has arisen in these days, amusing itself by the vindication of bad men. We think that the author of the Law of Prairial was a bad man. But it is time that there should be an end of the cant which lifts up its hands at the crimes of republicans and freethinkers, and shuts its eyes to the crimes of kings and churches. Once more, we ought to rise into a higher air; we ought to condemn, wherever we find it, whether on the side of our adversaries or on our own, all readiness to substitute arbitrary force for the processes of ordered justice. There are moments when such a readiness may be leniently judged, but Prairial of 1794 was not one of them either in France or in England. And what makes the crime of this law more odious, is its association with the official proclamation of the State worship of a Supreme Being. The scene of Robespierre's holy festival becomes as abominable as a catholic Auto-da-fé, where solemn homage was offered to the God of pity and loving-kindness, while flame glowed round the limbs of the victims.

Robespierre was inflamed with resentment, not because so many people were guillotined every day, but because the objects of his own enmity were not among them. He was chagrined at the miscarriage of his scheme; but the chagrin had its root in his desire for order, and not in his humanity. A good man—say so imperfectly good a man as Danton—could not have endured life, after enacting such a law, and seeing the ghastly work that it was doing. He could hardly have contented himself with drawing tears from the company in Madame Duplay's little parlour, by his pathetic recitations from Corneille and Racine, or with listening to melting notes from the violin of Le Bas. It is commonly said by Robespierre's defenders that he withdrew from the Committee of Public Safety, as soon as he found out that he was powerless to arrest the daily shedding of blood. The older assumption used to be that he left Paris, and ceased to be cognisant of the Committee's deliberations. The minutes, however, prove that this was not the case. Robespierre signed papers nearly every day of Messidor—(June 19 to July 18) the blood-stained month between Prairial and Thermidor—and was thoroughly aware of the doings of the Committee. His partisans have now fallen back on the singular theory of what they style moral absence. He was present in the flesh, but standing aloof in the spirit. His frowning silence was a deadlier rebuke to the slayers and oppressors than secession. Unfortunately for this ingenious explanation of the embarrassing fact of a merciful man standing silent before merciless doings, there are at least two facts that show its absurdity. [Pg 112]

First, there is the affair of Catherine Théot. Catherine Théot was a crazy old woman of a type that is commoner in protestant than in catholic countries. She believed herself to have special gifts in the interpretation of the holy writings, and a few other people as crazy as herself chose to accept her pretensions. One revelation vouchsafed to her was to the effect that Robespierre was a Messiah and the new redeemer of the human race. The Committee of General Security resolved to indict this absurd sect. Vadier,—one of the roughest of the men whom the insurrections of Paris had brought to the front—reported on the charges to the Convention (27 Prairial, June 15), and he took the opportunity to make Robespierre look profoundly ridiculous. The unfortunate Messiah sat on his bench, gnawing his lips with bitter rage, while, amid the sneers and laughter of the Convention, the officers brought to the bar the foolish creatures who had called him the Son of God. His thin pride and prudish self-respect were unutterably affronted, and he quite understood that the ridicule of the mysticism of Théot was an indirect pleasantry upon his own Supreme Being. He flew to the Committee of Public Safety, angrily reproached them for permitting the prosecution, summoned Fouquier-Tinville, and peremptorily ordered him to let the matter drop. In vain did the public prosecutor point out that there was a decree of the Convention ordering him to proceed. Robespierre was inexorable. The Committee of General Security were baffled, and the prosecution ended. 'Lutteur impuissant et fatigué,' says M. Hamel, the most thoroughgoing defender of Robespierre, upon this, 'il va se retirer, moralement du moins.' Impotent and wearied! But he had just won a most signal victory for good sense and humanity. Why was it the only one? If Robespierre was able to save Théot, why could he not save Cécile Renault? [Pg 114]

Cécile Renault was a young seamstress who was found one evening at the door of Robespierre's lodging, calling out in a state of exaltation that she would fain see what a tyrant looked like. She was arrested, and upon her were found two little knives used for the purposes of her trade. That she should be arrested and imprisoned was natural enough. The times were charged with deadly fire. People had not forgotten that Marat had been murdered in his own house. Only a few days before Cécile Renault's visit to Robespierre, an assassin had fired a pistol at Collot d'Herbois on the staircase of his apartment. We may make allowance for the excitement of the hour, and Robespierre had as much right to play the martyr, as had Lewis the Fifteenth after the incident of Damiens' rusty pen-knife. But the histrionic exigencies of the chief of a faction ought not to be pushed too far. And it was a monstrous crime that because Robespierre found it convenient to pose as sacrificial victim at the Club, therefore he should have had no scruple in seeing not only the wretched Cécile, but her father, her aunt, and one of her brothers, all despatched to the guillotine in the red shirt of parricide, as agents of Pitt and Coburg, and assassins of the father of the land. This was exactly two days after he had shown his decisive power in the affair of the religious illuminists. The only possible conclusion open to a plain man after weighing and putting [Pg 115]

aside all the sophisms with which this affair has been obscured, is that Robespierre interfered in the one case because its further prosecution would have tended to make him ridiculous, and he did not interfere in the other, because the more exaggerated, the more melodramatic, the more murderous it was made, the more interesting an object would he seem in the eyes of his adorers.

The second fact bearing on Robespierre's humanity is this. He had encouraged the formation and stimulated the activity of popular commissions, who should provide victims for the Revolutionary Tribunal. On the Second of Messidor (June 20) a list containing one hundred and thirty-eight names was submitted for the ratification of the Committee. The Committee endorsed the bloody document, and the last signature of the endorsement is that of him, who had resigned a post in his youth rather than be a party to putting a man to death. As was observed at the time, Robespierre in doing this, suppressed his pique against his colleagues, in order to take part in a measure, that was a sort of complement to his Law of Prairial.

From these two circumstances, then, even if there were no other, we are justified in inferring that Robespierre was struck by no remorse at the thought that it was his law which had unbound the hands of the horrible genie of civil murder. His mind was wholly absorbed in the calculations of a frigid egoism. His intelligence, as we have always to remember, was very dim. He only aimed at one thing at once, and that was seldom anything very great or far-reaching. He was a man of peering and obscured vision in face of practical affairs. In passing the Law of Prairial, his designs—and they were meritorious and creditable designs enough in themselves—had been directed against the corrupt chiefs, such as Tallien and Fouché, and against the fierce and coarse spirits of the Committee of General Security, such as Vadier and Voulland. Robespierre was above all things a precisian. He had a sentimental sympathy with the common people in the abstract, but his spiritual pride, his pedantry, his formalism, his personal fastidiousness, were all wounded to the very quick by the kind of men whom the Revolution had thrown to the surface. Gouverneur Morris, then the American minister, describes most of the members of the two Committees as the very dregs of humanity, with whom it is a stain to have any dealings; as degraded men only worthy of the profoundest contempt. Danton had said: 'Robespierre is the least of a scoundrel of any of the band.' The Committee of General Security represented the very elements by which Robespierre was most revolted. They offended his respectability; their evil manners seemed to tarnish that good name which his vanity hoped to make as revered all over Europe, as it already was among his partisans in France. It was indispensable therefore to cut them off from the revolutionary government, just as Hébert and as Danton had been cut off. His colleagues of Public Safety refused to lend themselves to this. Henceforth, with characteristically narrow tenacity, he looked round for new combinations, but, so far as I can see, with no broader design than to enable him to punish these particular objects of his very just detestation.

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The position of sections and interests which ended in the Revolution of Thermidor, is one of the most extraordinarily intricate and entangled in the history of faction. It would take a volume to follow out all the peripeteias of the drama. Here we can only enumerate in a few sentences the parties to the contest and the conditions of the game. The reader will easily discern the difficulty in Robespierre's way of making an effective combination. First, there were the two Committees. Of these the one, the General Security, was thoroughly hostile to Robespierre; its members, as we have said, were wild and hardy spirits, with no political conception, and with a great contempt for fine phrases and philosophical principles. They knew Robespierre's hatred for them, and they heartily returned it. They were the steadfast centre of the changing schemes which ended in his downfall. The Committee of Public Safety was divided. Carnot hated Saint Just, and Collot d'Herbois hated Robespierre, and Billaud had a sombre distrust of Robespierre's counsels. Shortly speaking, the object of the Billaudists was to retain their power, and their power was always menaced from two quarters, the Convention and Paris. If they let Robespierre have his own way against his enemies, would they not be at his mercy whenever he chose to devise a popular insurrection against them? Yet if they withstood Robespierre, they could only do so through the agency of the Convention, and to fall back upon the Convention would be to give that body an express invitation to resume the power that had, in the pressure of the crisis a year before, been delegated to the Committee, and periodically renewed afterwards. The dilemma of Billaud seemed desperate, and events afterwards proved that it was so.

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If we turn to the Convention, we find the position equally distracting. They, too, feared another insurrection and a second decimation. If the Right helped Robespierre to destroy the Fouchés and Vadiers, he would be stronger than ever; and what security had they against a repetition of the violence of the Thirty-first of May? If the Dantonists joined in destroying Robespierre, they would be helping the Right, and what security had they against a Girondin reaction? On the other hand, the Centre might fairly hope, just what Billaud feared, that if the Committee came to the Convention to crush Robespierre, that would end in a combination strong enough to enable the Convention to crush the Committees.

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Much depended on military success. The victories of the generals were the great strength of the Committee. For so long it would be difficult to turn opinion against a triumphant administration. 'At the first defeat,' Robespierre had said to Barère, 'I await you.' But the defeat did not come. The plotting went on with incessant activity; on one hand, Robespierre, aided by Saint Just and Couthon, strengthening himself at the Jacobin Club, and through that among the sections; on the other, the Mountain and the Committee of General Security trying to win over the Right, more contemptuously christened the Marsh or the Belly, of the Convention. The Committee of Public Safety was not yet fully decided how to act.

At the end of the first week of Thermidor, Robespierre could endure the tension no longer. He

had tried to fortify his nerves for the struggle by riding, but with so little success that he was lifted off his horse fainting. He endeavoured to steady himself by diligent pistol-practice. But nothing gave him initiative and the sinews of action. Saint Just urged him to raise Paris. Some bold men proposed to carry off the members of the Committee bodily from their midnight deliberations. Robespierre declined, and fell back on what he took to be his greatest strength and most unflinching resource; he prepared a speech. On the Eighth of Thermidor he delivered it to the Convention, amid intense excitement both within its walls and without. All Paris knew that they were now on the eve of one more of the famous Days; the revolution of Thermidor had begun.

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The speech of the Eighth Thermidor has seemed to men of all parties since a masterpiece of tactical ineptitude. If Robespierre had been a statesman instead of a phrasemonger, he had a clear course. He ought to have taken the line of argument that Danton would have taken. That is to say, he ought to have identified himself fully with the interests and security of the Convention; to have accepted the growing resolution to close the Terror; to have boldly pressed the abolition of the Committee of General Security, and the removal from the Committee of Public Safety of Billaud, Collot, Barère; to have proposed to send about fifty persons to Cayenne for life; and to have urged a policy of peace with the foreign powers. This was the substantial wisdom and real interest of the position. The task was difficult, because his hearers had the best possible reasons for knowing that the author of the Law of Prairial was a Terrorist on principle. And in truth we know that Robespierre had no definite intention of erecting clemency into a rule. He had not mental strength enough to throw off the profound apprehension, which the incessant alarms of the last five years had engendered in him; and the only device, that he could imagine for maintaining the republic against traitors, was to stimulate the rigour of the Revolutionary Tribunal.

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If, however, Robespierre lacked the grasp which might have made him the representative of a broad and stable policy, it was at least his interest to persuade the men of the Plain that he entertained no designs against them. And this is what in his own mind he intended. But to do it effectively, it was clearly best to tell his hearers, in so many words, whom he really wished them to strike. That would have relieved the majority, and banished the suspicion which had been busily fomented by his enemies, that he had in his pocket a long list of their names, for proscription. But Robespierre, having for the first time in his life ventured on aggressive action without the support of a definite party, faltered. He dared not to designate his enemies face to face and by name. Instead of that, he talked vaguely of conspirators against the republic, and calumniators of himself. There was not a single bold, definite, unmistakable sentence in the speech from first to last. The men of the Plain were insecure and doubtful; they had no certainty that among conspirators and calumniators he did not include too many of themselves. People are not so readily seized by grand phrases, when their heads are at stake. The sitting was long, and marked by changing currents and reverses. When they broke up, all was left uncertain. Robespierre had suffered a check. Billaud felt that he could no longer hesitate in joining the combination against his colleague. Each party was aware that the next day must seal the fate of one or other of them. There is a legend that in the evening Robespierre walked in the Champs Elysées with his betrothed, accompanied as usual by his faithful dog, Brout. They admired the purple of the sunset, and talked of the prospect of a glorious to-morrow. But this is apocryphal. The evening was passed in no lover's saunterings, but amid the storm and uproar of the Club. He went to the Jacobins to read over again his speech of the day. 'It is my testament of death,' he said, amid the passionate protestations of his devoted followers. He had been talking for the last three years of his willingness to drink the hemlock, and to offer his breast to the poniards of tyrants. That was a fashion of the speech of the time, and in earlier days it had been more than a fashion of speech, for Brunswick would have given them short shrift. But now, when he talked of his last testament, Robespierre did not intend it to be so if he could prevent it. When he went to rest that night, he had a tolerably calm hope that he should win the next day's battle in the Convention, when he was aware that Saint Just would attack the Committees openly and directly. If he would have allowed his band to invade the Pavillon de Flore, and carry off or slay the Committees who sat up through the night, the battle would have been won when he awoke. His friends are justified in saying that his strong respect for legality was the cause of his ruin.

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Men in all ages have had a superstitious fondness for connecting awful events in their lives with portents and signs among the outer elements. It was noticed that the heat during the terrible days of Thermidor was more intense than had been known within the memory of man. The thermometer never fell below sixty-five degrees in the coolest part of the night, and in the daytime men and women and beasts of burden fell down dead in the streets. By five o'clock in the morning of the Ninth Thermidor, the galleries of the Convention were filled by a boisterous and excited throng. At ten o'clock the proceedings began as usual with the reading of correspondence from the departments and from the armies. Robespierre, who had been escorted from his lodgings by the usual body of admirers, instead of taking his ordinary seat, remained standing by the side of the tribune. It is a familiar fact that moments of appalling suspense are precisely those in which we are most ready involuntarily to note a trifle; everybody observed that Robespierre wore the coat of violet-blue silk and the white nankeens in which a few weeks previously he had done honour to the Supreme Being.

The galleries seemed as enthusiastic as ever. The men of the Plain and the Marsh had lost the abject mien with which they usually cowered before Robespierre's glance; they wore a courageous air of judicial reserve. The leaders of the Mountain wandered restlessly to and fro among the corridors. At noon Tallien saw that Saint Just had ascended the tribune. Instantly he rushed down into the chamber, knowing that the battle had now begun in fierce earnest. Saint

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Just had not got through two sentences, before Tallien interrupted him. He began to insist with energy that there should be an end to the equivocal phrases with which Paris had been too long alarmed by the Triumvirate. Billaud, fearing to be outdone in the attack, hastily forced his way to the tribune, broke into what Tallien was saying, and proceeded dexterously to discredit Robespierre's allies without at once assailing Robespierre himself. Le Bas ran in a fury to stop him; Collot d'Herbois, the president, declared Le Bas out of order; the hall rang with cries of 'To prison! To the Abbey!' and Le Bas was driven from the tribune. This was the beginning of the tempest. Robespierre's enemies knew that they were fighting for their lives, and this inspired them with a strong and resolute power that is always impressive in popular assemblies. He still thought himself secure. Billaud pursued his accusations. Robespierre, at last, unable to control himself, scaled the tribune. There suddenly burst forth from Tallien and his partisans vehement shouts of 'Down with the tyrant! down with the tyrant!' The galleries were swept by a wild frenzy of vague agitation; the president's bell poured loud incessant clanging into the tumult; the men of the Plain held themselves firm and silent; in the tribune raged ferocious groups, Tallien menacing Robespierre with a dagger, Billaud roaring out proposals to arrest this person and that Robespierre gesticulating, threatening, yelling, shrieking. His enemies knew that if he were once allowed to get a hearing, his authority might even yet overawe the waverers. A penetrative word or a heroic gesture might lose them the day. The majority of the chamber still hesitated. They called for Barère, in whose adroit faculty for discovering the winning side they had the confidence of long experience. Robespierre, recovering some of his calm, and perceiving now that he had really to deal with a serious revolt, again asked to be heard before Barère. But the cries for Barère were louder than ever. Barère spoke, in a sense hostile to Robespierre, but warily and without naming him.

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Then there was a momentary lull. The Plain was uncertain. The battle might even now turn either way. Robespierre made another attempt to speak, but Tallien with intrepid fury broke out into a torrent of louder and more vehement invective. Robespierre's shrill voice was heard in disjected snatches, amidst the violent tones of Tallien, the yells of the president calling Robespierre to order, the murderous clanging of the bell. Then came that supreme hour of the struggle, whose tale has been so often told, when Robespierre turned from his old allies of the Mountain, and succeeded in shrieking out an appeal to the probity and virtue of the Right and the Plain. To his horror, even these despised men, after a slight movement, remained mute. Then his cheeks blanched, and the sweat ran down his face. But anger and scornful impatience swiftly came back and restored him. *President of assassins*, he cried out to Thuriot, *for the last time I ask to be heard. Thou canst not speak, called one, the blood of Danton chokes thee.* He flung himself down the steps of the tribune, and rushed towards the benches of the Right. *Come no further*, cried another, *Vergniaud and Condorcet sat here.* He regained the tribune, but his speech was gone. He was reduced to the dregs of an impotent and gasping voiceless gesticulation, like the strife of one in a nightmare.

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The day was lost. The tension of a passionate and violent struggle prolonged for many hours always at length exasperates onlookers with something of the brute ferocity of the actors. The physical strain stirs the tiger in the blood; they conceive a cruel hatred against weakness, just as the heated throng of a Roman amphitheatre turned up their thumbs for the instant despatch of the unfortunate swordsman who had been too ready to lower his arms. The Right, the Plain, even the galleries, despised the man who had succumbed. If Robespierre had possessed the physical strength of Mirabeau or Danton, the Ninth Thermidor would have been another of his victories. He was crushed by the relentless ferocity and endurance of his antagonists. A decree for his arrest was resolved upon by acclamation. He cast a glance at the galleries, as marvelling that they should remain passive in face of an outrage on his person. They were mute. The ushers advanced with hesitation to do their duty, and not without trembling carried him away, along with Couthon and Saint Just. The brother, for whom he had made honourable sacrifices in days that seemed to be divided from the present by an abyss of centuries, insisted with fine heroism on sharing his fate, and Augustin Robespierre and Le Bas were led off to the prisons along with their leader and idol.

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It was now a little after four o'clock. The Convention, with the self-possession that so often amazes us in its proceedings, went on with formal business for another hour. At five they broke up. For life, as the poets tell, is a daily stage-play; men declaim their high heroic parts, then doff the buskin or the sock, wash away the paint from their cheeks, and gravely sit down to meat. The Conventionals, as they ate their dinners, were unconscious, apparently, that the great crisis of the drama was still to come. The next twelve hours were to witness the climax. Robespierre had been crushed by the Convention; it remained to be seen whether the Convention would not now be crushed by the Commune of Paris.

Robespierre was first conducted to the prisons of the Luxembourg. The gaoler, on some plea of informality, refused to receive him. The terrible prisoner was next taken to the Mairie, where he remained among joyful friends from eight in the evening until eleven. Meanwhile the old insurrectionary methods of the nights of June and of August in '92, of May and of June in '93, were again followed. The beating of the *rappel* and the *générale* was heard in all the sections; the tocsin sounded its dreadful note, reminding all who should hear it that insurrection is the most sacred and the most indispensable of duties. Hanriot, the commandant of the forces, had been arrested in the evening, but he was speedily released by the agents of the Commune. The Council issued manifestoes and decrees from the Common Hall every moment. The barriers were closed. Cannon were posted opposite the doors of the hall of the Convention. The quays were thronged. Emissaries sped to and fro between the Jacobin Club and the Common Hall, and between these

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two centres and each of the forty-eight sections. It is one of the inscrutable mysteries of this delirious night, that Hanriot did not at once use the force at his command to break up the Convention. There is no obvious reason why he should not have done so. The members of the Convention had re-assembled after their dinner, towards seven o'clock. The hall which had resounded with the shrieks and yells of the furious gladiators of the factions all day, now lent a lugubrious echo to gloomy reports which one member after another delivered from the shadow of the tribune. Towards nine o'clock the members of the two dread Committees came in panic to seek shelter among their colleagues, 'as dejected in their peril,' says an eyewitness, 'as they had been cruel and insolent in the hour of their supremacy.' When they heard that Hanriot had been released, and that guns were at their door, all gave themselves up for lost and made ready for death. News came that Robespierre had broken his arrest and gone to the Common Hall. Robespierre, after urgent and repeated solicitations, had been at length persuaded about an hour before midnight to leave the Mairie and join his partisans of the Commune. This was an act of revolt against the Convention, for the Mairie was a legal place of detention, and so long as he was there, he was within the law. The Convention with heroic intrepidity declared both Hanriot and Robespierre beyond the pale of the law. This prompt measure was its salvation. Twelve members were instantly named to carry the decree to all the sections. With the scarf of office round their waists, and a sabre in hand, they sallied forth. Mounting horses, and escorted by attendants with flaring torches, they scoured Paris, calling all good citizens to the succour of the Convention, haranguing crowds at the street corners with power and authority, and striking the imaginations of men. At midnight heavy rain began to fall.

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The leaders of the Commune meanwhile, in full confidence that victory was sure, contented themselves with incessant issue of paper decrees, to each of which the Convention replied by a counter-decree. Those who have studied the situation most minutely, are of opinion that even so late as one o'clock in the morning, the Commune might have made a successful defence, although it had lost the opportunity, which it had certainly possessed up to ten o'clock, of destroying the Convention. But on this occasion the genius of insurrection slumbered. And there was a genuine division of opinion in the eastern quarters of Paris, the result of a grim distrust of the man who had helped to slay Hébert and Chaumette. At a word this distrust began to declare itself. The opinion of the sections became more and more distracted. One armed group cried, *Down with the Convention!* Another armed group cried, *The Convention for ever, and down with the Commune!* The two great faubourgs were all astir, and three battalions were ready to march. Emissaries from the Convention actually succeeded in persuading them—such the dementia of the night—that Robespierre was a royalist agent, and that the Commune were about to deliver the little Lewis from his prison in the Temple. One body of communist partisans after another was detached from its allegiance. The deluge of rain emptied the Place de Grève, and when companies came up from the sections in obedience to orders from Hanriot and the Commune, the silence made them suspect a trap, and they withdrew towards the great metropolitan church or elsewhere.

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Barras, whom the Convention had charged with its military defence, gathered together some six thousand men. With the right instinct of a man who had studied the history of Paris since the July of 1789, he foresaw the advantage of being the first to make the attack. He arranged his forces into two divisions. One of them marched along the quays to take the Common Hall in front; the other along the Rue Saint Honoré to take it in flank. Inside the Common Hall the staircases and corridors were alive with bustling messengers, and those mysterious busybodies who are always found lingering without a purpose on the skirts of great historic scenes. Robespierre and the other chiefs were in a small room, preparing manifestoes and signing decrees. They were curiously unaware of the movements of the Convention. An aggressive attack by the party of authority upon the party of insurrection was unknown in the tradition of revolt. They had an easy assurance that at daybreak their forces would be prepared once more to tramp along the familiar road westwards. It was now half-past two. Robespierre had just signed the first two letters of his name to a document before him, when he was startled by cries and uproar in the Place below. In a few instants he lay stretched on the ground, his jaw shattered by a pistol-shot. His brother had either fallen or had leaped out of the window. Couthon was hurled over a staircase, and lay for dead. Saint Just was a prisoner.

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Whether Robespierre was shot by an officer of the Conventional force, or attempted to blow out his own brains, we shall never know, any more than we shall ever be quite assured how Rousseau, his spiritual master, came to an end. The wounded man was carried, a ghastly sight, first to the Committee of Public Safety, and then to the Conciergerie, where he lay in silent stupefaction through the heat of the summer day. As he was an outlaw, the only legal preliminary before execution was to identify him. At five in the afternoon, he was raised into the cart Couthon and the younger Robespierre lay, confused wrecks of men, at the bottom of it. Hanriot and Saint Just, bruised, begrimed, and foul, completed the band. One who walks from the Palace of Justice, over the bridge, along the Rue Saint Honoré, into the Rue Royale, and so to the Luxor column, retraces the *via dolorosa* of the Revolution on the afternoon of the Tenth of Thermidor.

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The end of the intricate manœuvres known as the Revolution of Thermidor was the recovery of authority by the Convention. The insurrections, known as the days of the Twelfth Germinal, First Prairial, and Thirteenth Vendémiaire, all ended in the victory of the Convention over the revolutionary forces of Paris. The Committees, on the other hand, had beaten Robespierre, but

they had ruined themselves. Very gradually the movement towards order, which had begun in the mind of Danton, and had gone on in the cloudy purposes of Robespierre, became definite. But it was in the interest of very different ideas from those of either Danton or of Robespierre. A White Terror succeeded the Red Terror. Not at once, however; it was not until nine months after the death of Robespierre, that the reaction was strong enough to smite his colleagues of the two Committees. The surviving Girondins had come back to their seats in the Convention: the Dantonians had not forgiven the execution of their chief. These two parties were bent on vengeance. In April, 1795, a decree was passed banishing Billaud de Varennes, Collot d'Herbois, and Barère. In the following month the leaders of the Committee of General Security were thrown into prison. The revolution had passed into new currents. We cannot see any reasons for thinking that those currents would have led to any happier results if Robespierre had won the battle. Tallien, Fouché, Barras, and the rest may have been thoroughly bad men. But then what qualities had Robespierre for building up a state? He had neither strength of practical character, nor firm breadth of political judgment, nor a sound social doctrine. When we compare him,—I do not say with Frederick of Prussia, with Jefferson, with Washington,—but with the group of able men who made the closing year of the Convention honourable and of good service to France, we have a measure of Robespierre's profound and pitiable incompetence.

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*** END OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK CRITICAL MISCELLANIES (VOL. 1 OF 3),
ESSAY 1: ROBESPIERRE ***

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