

# LA DOUCEUR DE VIVRE

*Under the Reign of Terror*

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## FOREWORD

I have written this paper as if I were one of those mundane abbés so common in good society in the eighteenth century. It is in the form of excerpts from a diary and memoirs.

In this imagined pre-existence of mine, I have chosen to be born around 1745, to have jotted down the diary about 1786-87, on the eve of the French Revolution (1789), and to have composed the memoirs thirty years later, after the restoration of the Bourbons to the throne of France, say, about 1816.

H. C.-E. D.



## LA DOUCEUR DE VIVRE

*JUNE 15.* Yesterday, at home all day. Stomach tortured with remorse. Yours was a fine supper, Mme Helvetius, worthy of the philosophers you gather around your table. Thanks to Voltaire, Diderot, Rousseau, and your late husband, philosophers have taken the place of the gods. But you are a Circe for I ate like a pig. Well, I forgive you for the sake of those stuffed quails with the mushroom sauce. A sharp souvenir, all the same.

Drank lots of hot water, sunk in my *bergère* with a big volume of Bayle in my lap. *The Historical and Critical Dictionary!* Good title. I love the word "critical." My good masters, the Jesuit fathers, were not so fond of you, eh my inquisitive heretic? You lead me on the wide road of damnation and I must confess that I damn myself most willingly and not without keen delight. You have surely taught Voltaire to be as indiscreet as he was, and Indiscretion, not Clio, is now the muse of History. My good friend, Pierre Bayle, you spare nobody, I see. Here is your article on Martin Luther. That terrible monk married and he married a nun, the rascal, a twofold mortal sin. This is a historical fact. Now comes the critical note. How insidious! This nun, you ask, how did she look? Was she tall or short, fat or thin, fair or dark? Was she pretty? Our fine noblemen are not so fastidious (I should rather say their progenitors) about the choice of a wife. Here's a chance to make an observation about our manners. The Prince of Nassau-Saarbruck chose for his son, age twelve, Mlle de Montbarrey, age eighteen. The bridegroom, vexed to be

looked at by every guest at his wedding, wept and sobbed from morning to night, rude to his bride, indifferent to his husband's rights, of which he had not the slightest idea. Meanwhile, the bride was sent back to her convent. Anyway, the two families are now united by a "congruous indecency" as Chamfort calls marriage. O shade of Jean-Jacques, your heroine, Héroïse, and her passionate lover felt very differently. You have done a good deal for the advent of sensibility in literature. Our light-hearted, sensual poetry will be transformed by you. Romantic love mixed with natural religion will raise Nature's veil and your two immortal lovers will be understood. Now, Monsieur Bayle, you ask another question: When St. Ignatius Loyola was completing his studies in Paris, much older than his school-mates, in what college was it that he was birched? Ah! What an impertinence under the guise of scholarly research! What an iconoclast you are! What you are driving at is this: However high some men may tower above their fellow-men, they are yet mere men. At bottom, we are all the same, all subject to the same recurrent frailties, all equal. Our Lord has taught us that truth, but equality has remained so far only in religion, in the chancel of the church, in the pulpit of the preacher. The conclusion is obvious and most humane: No moral truth is certain enough to give us, mortal wretches, the right to cut each other's throat. Living amidst fanatics turns a thinker into a cynic.

Pascal thought that physical pain is not bad for a man's soul. The heroic ascetic believed that nature did not make him suffer enough, so he used to wear under his clothes, next his bare skin, a leather belt studded with sharp nails. Every time frivolous notions flickered through his brain, he pressed on his side with his elbow. Hai!—the pain brought him back instantly to the straight and narrow path. Gracious goodness! How far we have gone astray since Pascal's days! I, too, have just now my pricking nail, those quails. Of what good to me is my stomach-ache? I get it! I cannot help thinking about that accident,

yesterday afternoon. Young Breteuil had taken me in his coach on his way to Auteuil. Auteuil—what pleasant recollections that name alone awakes! My faith! I don't like to ride. Breteuil's coachman drives no faster than his brothers, I suppose, but that's too fast for me! Anyway, in these narrow, crowded Paris streets, driving full speed as befits the equipage of a lord, we managed to bruise an old woman and kill outright an apprentice engraver. The populace did not like it, of course, and the police did nothing about it, for it was the big rear wheel that crushed the poor lad. One is only responsible, I learned, for the small front wheel. Everything is well regulated in the kingdom of His most Christian Majesty! Yet, I must confess, I felt shivery the rest of the trip. Maybe that unfortunate event had upset my vitals. Yes, that's it, the whole affair. I heard distinctly, above the cries and screams, several threats and curses. Bad, omen—very bad! The rabble, nowadays, does not take things so patiently as it used to. Even light-hearted, waggish Breteuil grew pale. I guess I have the blues. No more of that! Would that I had now a glass of that Medoc of last night!

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NOVEMBER 8. What a lucky dog I am to live in Paris and in the very center of its social life! No cause whatever to regret having become a publicist, though the pen is the wretched midwife of the mind, and lords, nowadays, are not so liberal with rewarding dedications as in the past. My benefices also aren't so good, getting them is like pulling teeth. I shall have to accept more invitations to dinner. What about inviting myself and paying for my fare with smart repartees? Humph! I know, I shall have to pay a more assiduous court to my lively old widow, my lady of Providence. My revered father complains bitterly of the meager crops. It's not the fault of his peasants, he says. They have to work more than ever at the roads, which have been multiplied for the movements of the troops. And a larger

number of the lads are enrolled in the navy and the army. With every improvement in the state the heavier becomes the peasants' burden and, on top of work and service, the enormous weight of the administrative machinery. Taxes piled upon taxes. If the toilers ever know the figures of the court expenses and how the money is spent, what use is made of their sweat and blood? . . . King Louis XV (or was it Pompadour?) when confronted with the deficit, that broken cistern of the Danaids, felt so helpless that he or she exclaimed: "After us the deluge!" I dread that deluge. It will soon be ten years since I left our ancestral home, the old, much-patched-up feudal château. Ten years! Time goes so fast in this wonderful Paris. Meanwhile, my ideas and outlook have changed quite a bit. I hardly recognize myself. Voltaire, Diderot, Montesquieu, Jean-Jacques have stirred up questions that many a wise man thought were settled for good. Is it not a piquant thing that Voltaire has been seconded in his relentless attacks upon the Catholic church mostly by Catholic churchmen? I don't mean the churchmen that have discredited the church by their internal fanatical quarrels and persecutions, I mean men like Condillac and Mably, and the host of abbés like me, who have written for Diderot's *Encyclopédie*. Forsooth, all of us were men of little faith or no faith at all. God knows that our calling was not determined by free choice but by family custom, if not by compulsion. "*Compelle intrare!*" "Constrain them to come in!" The devil himself may quote the Scriptures. The more ambitious of us valued the mind a good deal more than the spirit. Have not the blessed humanities unlocked the poetic grandeur of the Bible? To be sure the *Encyclopédie*, with its illuminating articles on all subjects to enlighten men and fight obscurantism, is an everlasting monument raised to freedom. Toward the completion of the work, I had been assigned research in political economy, my hobby. What exasperating and endless troubles we had with the censorship! But who would blame the flurried and bewildered censors? These thick

folios sap unmercifully the roots of the thousand-year-old social tree. This trite metaphor suggests to me that I am more or less a parasite. But, in all fairness, I don't think I am killing the venerable oak on which I thrive like a bunch—a tiny one—of mistletoe. If the oak is dying—and it is—it's because it's rotten inside. The *Encyclopédie* gave it the push over.

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MARCH 19. I've come back from the Procope's café. Without further delay, I ought to take note of some of the things I heard and overheard there. Most of them are foreboding evils. A famine is imminent, again, again! News that is *not* news in our kingdom, alas! But this time it's something different. The French populace have been told that starving is *not* a visitation of Providence to chastise, for their sins and in view of their ultimate salvation, the humble, the meek, and the mournful. This famine has causes that are altogether too evident. The distribution of the grain is hampered less by the bad state of the roads than by the officials' and clerks' indolence and laziness. But that is not all. The daily bread our starving population pray our Lord for is gambled by shameless speculators whose scandalous profits are winked at by the King, provided they pay an annual percentage of their robberies to persons designated by him, and he is careful not to omit among them members of his own family. Think of it, the father of the French people by divine right sucking like a leech the blood of his children! Shame! The police have torn down placards upbraiding the ministers and threatening, if no redress is soon coming, to set fire to the city. The price of bread is rising, discontent is everywhere, and no relief, no remedy is in sight. The masses are sick of the King, the courtiers, and the officials. Not so long ago, the common people had an angelic faith in their king. Every time something went wrong, they believed it was the fault of the nobles and officials and they exclaimed: "If our good king only knew it!" Now, they know that the King



knows and that the King does nothing. At the next table sat an old man who said that this piece of news was grossly exaggerated. Many a lord and governor was humane and had at heart the people's good. He himself knew of a count who wanted to replace the thatch roof of his peasants' cottages with tiles—at his own expense, mind you. Now, would you believe it? His peasants were so dumb that they refused. Then, what can you do? His neighbor sneered and said he knew all about that case. It was true that the peasants had begged their lord not to do anything about their roofs, and it was not at all because they were stupid. It was from fear of having heavier taxes to pay on account of this sign of prosperity. "There are countless numbers of improvements," he added, "rendered impossible by the greed of the farmer-generals of revenues." A companion of his said: "It is only lately that I have heard of the *people* in conversation about the government. This is a fruit of the new philosophy." I lent an attentive ear. "This mention of the *people*," he went on, "is the bitter fruit of the balderdash of hack writers, vile knaves who lived in garrets. How do you call them—De trop, Ruisseau?" [Meaning "gutter."] "Diderot, Rousseau," I corrected icily. The gentleman—Duke of Castries, I guessed—turned toward me in ending his remark: "Don't you know," said he, "that the third estate is but adventitious in the constitution?"

"You amuse me, sir," said I, my blood boiling. "Your big word, your fine word *adventitious* means that 23,900,000 men are but an accident, an accessory in the totality of 24,000,000 of the king's subjects. Ridiculous!"

I could hardly control myself. A single embezzlement of a food contractor cost the lives of five thousand men. By God, the King is well served! Around us a circle had formed. The discussion became general. Everybody wanted to have his say. All talked together. Above the hubbub, I heard a shrill voice shouting: "Let us strangle the last king with the guts of the last priest!" At that point, I took French leave. Safety first!

I had spoken enough. Too many eavesdroppers and *mouchards* around. Where are the good old days, when people were more patient, more resigned to their fate, when they talked less and sang more, when it could be rightly said that France was an absolute monarchy tempered by songs! I am afraid we shall have to pay a high price for all this enlightenment. That fop of a Castries speaking of Diderot and Rousseau as "vile knaves who lived in garrets"! Have you ever?

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APRIL 20. Young Breteuil told us in great detail of a hunting party, at Savern, on Cardinal Rohan's magnificent estate. "Six hundred peasants and wardens formed a chain one league long to beat up the game. The hunters, women as well as men, had their places assigned. It goes without saying that the ladies, not to feel lonesome, had the gentlemen they loved best placed by their side. This was most tactful, the ladies were fully reassured. About one in the afternoon, all the hunters assembled under a beautiful tent, in a lovely spot on the bank of a babbling brook, where a delicious dinner was served. Everybody was merry. Even the country people had plenty to eat and drink."

"I can see the whole scene," said the Marchioness: "Watteau's 'Embarking for Cythera.'"

"I wish you had been at Little Trianon, last week," said Sillery. "The park had been transformed into a fairground. The court ladies were dressed as farmers' wives. What shimmering silks and downy velvets! The Queen kept a café."

"Was it the café of the Regency?" said a courtier of the Duke of Orleans. Sillery acted as if he had not heard and proceeded: "Fragonard for sure had designed her costume. I understand that feast cost 400,000 francs. And the Court will repeat it at Choisy, on a larger scale and at greater expense, of course."

The courtiers, always desirous to ape the King, follow in his steps and spend fortunes in receptions and gambling. In fact,

it has become one of the fads of the day to spend all one's own money—and others', the creditors', money—in the most foolish ways. Debts are the supreme elegance. To outdo Baron Senard, decrepit Chevalier de Villandry told us: "Who will ever forget that Chantilly feast, when the young and most charming Duchess of Bourbon, representing a voluptuous naiad, led the Russian Emperor in a gilt gondola all along the great canal to the Island of Love. You would have sworn you were in Alcina's garden. Tasso would not have believed his own eyes!"

Titled people play their parts still better today, they play them so well, indeed, you wonder whether you are not seated at the opera. How could it be otherwise? Is there any one of us that has not played at least once in a comedy or a tragedy? M. de Voltaire is responsible for all the private theaters. At his château of Ferney, every visitor was enrolled willy-nilly in his company of amateurs. The fashion does not spare the children. Sabran's children, a girl of eight and a boy of nine, have taken lessons with two of the best actors of the Comédie Française. Imagine! The two children were taken to Versailles to play Voltaire's tragedy *Oreste*. The little boy was questioned on classical authors by one of the Queen's ladies. She was at the time surrounded by her three charming daughters. You will never guess the boy's answer. He glanced at the three young ladies, then with his hat under his arm, he kissed the lady's hand and said most demurely: "Madame, at present I remember only Anacreon." That boy will go pretty far, *bons mots* lead almost to anything nowadays. Consider Beaumarchais! Is it possible not to be pleased with great events, even if they are injuring the country? They are the occasions for such clever and smart sayings! A witty repartee is like the mayonnaise that sets off an insipid fish. The famous or infamous Abbé Terray, comptroller-general under Louis XV, resorted to means of extracting money from His most Christian Majesty's subjects that were nothing else than regu-

lar highway robberies. His cynicism was so impudent, so crude, that one of his intimates told him that he acted like a pickpocket. "A pickpocket I am," said he. "Tell me, pray, where do people put their money if it is not in their pocket? The King is the master, he is always in dire need of money. For what? This is no business of mine. Necessity justifies everything." And to think that Montesquieu showed by historical evidence that monarchy, an aristocratic regime, rests on *honor*! We have fallen pretty low. Let us not fool ourselves, we are going to the devil. Some day public conscience will rebel. One more anecdote about these licensed highwaymen dignified by the name of ministers of finance, bankers, farmer-generals, etc. Small facts in history are most important, said M. de Voltaire. Cromwell's gravel and Cleopatra's nose have changed the course of history, the face of the world. I yield willingly to this mania. Trifles are the craze of the day. One of the King's ministers of finance desired to consult with one of the richest financiers of the kingdom. So he sent for him. The messenger reported that the financier was away—he had gone to take the waters at Barège. "Take the waters," said the minister, "I should have known he was taking something."

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OCTOBER 30. Always some confounded joy-killer around. This afternoon, the son of an uncle's steward asked to see me. He has come to Paris to visit a relative, a carpenter by trade. The boy is thoroughly discouraged. Not the slightest chance for him to learn a trade. The carpenters' corporation admits only the sons of its own members and it's full anyway. Better go back, he was told, to his village. There, the corporations have not been re-established. The country people, the lad told me, are so ill-treated that they seek refuge in the small towns where they become beggars and thieves. Some villages are completely deserted. Why should the peasants till the fields? The returns from poor crops are not big enough to meet the

enormous taxes. The peasants have sunk to such depth of despair that they want to die. They feed on bark and roots, even on dead animals. They sleep on straw or on the bare ground of hovels. They wander in woods as famished wolves, barefooted, half-naked or clad in rags. At a crossroads, not so very far from Paris, he noticed what at a first glance seemed to be small heaps of manure. Having come closer he discovered that they were two young women and three children of tender age stone dead by the roadside. One of the women still had bits of grass between her lips. I'll try to get a flunkey job for that boy. He seems to be bright, and has got eyes in his head. After he left, I remained at my desk as if I had been stunned. A passage from Labruyère's *Characters* rang in my ear: "One meets in the open country with all sorts of wild animals, male and female, dark, livid, tanned by the sun and the wind. As if they were attached to the earth, they dig desperately. When they rise and stand, they show a human face. They are men." These lines were written one hundred years ago. Today, the lot of these woebegone creatures is even worse. In the century of the philosophers I thought it could not be possible. Wars and famines, soldiers and tax-collectors have done their work. This is a rude awakening, Monsieur l'Abbé. No wonder English cartoonists picture the French frogs as stunted, paltry specimens of mankind! The king of France is the king of about 100,000 men with whom he divides the sweat, the blood, and the spoils of 24,000,000 men in ratios fixed by the feudal ideas—military, anti-moral, anti-politic—that have debased Europe for twenty centuries. Is the French nation spent or is there still some hope, a spark under these gray ashes?

From my seat in the theater where the bill announces every day that everlasting comedy *La Douceur de Vivre* ("The Suavity of Living") I see the backdrop suddenly torn apart and I behold the back of the stage. I leave the house.

OCTOBER, 1816. Tonight, after supper, over the coffee-cups, a young woman, the daughter of a prosperous businessman, wondered how people who inhabited Paris in 1793-94 could ever have lived through the Terror, how they could ever have stood such a horrible thing! And, seconding her, her titled fiancé, the son of an *émigré*, quoted Abbé Sieyès' famous answer to the question: "What did you do during the Terror?" "*I lived*," said he. "My charming interlocutor," said I, "allow me to be History for you, just for a moment." As much as I can remember here is what I said to the company:

"Father Time, you know, is a subtle magician whose cunning art consists in distorting almost everything, the more so when he finds in his audience people most ready to lend a hand in the conjuration of illusions, for the reason that their predominating interest is to have things disfigured." At this point, my young friends and their elders showed signs of uneasiness. But I am not averse to sailing against a head wind and I continued with a considerate generalization.

"The human mind has a natural affinity with error. It welcomes legend. But, once in a while, when it happens that a certain legend has become too silly for words, it rebels and looks for redress, it begs History to set the matter right.

"Like Abbé Sieyès, I can make his sensational statement, though with less self-consciousness. I was in Paris, under the whole Reign of Terror. I worked as hard as I could for the poor, the sick, the lowly, the mournful. I had realized that all my youth I had lived at the expense and to the sorrow of millions of wretched creatures and I did my best to return to them what I owed them. Hundreds of gentlemen, churchmen, and bourgeois did the same. We were convinced that the Revolution had done a great work of redemption and justice for all the French without distinction and we simply put into practice its principles of humanity and charity. In doing so, we felt we were at last consistent. Didn't we claim we were disciples of the philosophers? Didn't we boast of being Christians? None

of us experienced the slightest difficulty in passing through the Reign of Terror. Those of us who died did not die on the scaffold. The *sans-culottes* who knew us would have given their all, even their lives, for us. And the men in politics, who had really at heart the cause of the people, respected and protected us. Indeed, it was to protect the patriots from the mistakes the mob, blinded by their wrath and madness, might commit that the Revolutionary Tribunal was instituted. What a relief it was, I assure you!"

At this point, I was interrupted by the young gentleman. "Have you forgotten," he said, "the number of men and women who have been sentenced to death by this tribunal without the shadow of a trial?"

"No," I replied, "I have not forgotten this number. In Paris it was slightly more than two thousand five hundred, and double this figure in the rest of the country."

"Almost eight thousand then," he exclaimed. "It's disgusting, it's monstrous—eight thousand, think of it!"

"Without the Revolutionary Tribunal," I said, "whose work, as gruesome as it seems, reassured and then appeased the common people, Paris would have surely had a civil war, like the partial civil wars in Lyons, Toulon, Marseilles, Brittany, and Vendée."

Then my young man interrupted: "Why not? In the middle of '92, some of the more conservative provinces rebelled against the tyranny of the Commune of Paris, a radical minority, whose ambition was to govern the whole country!"

"Fortunately for the unity of France," I answered. "Your backward provinces wished to form a federation, raise armies to march against Paris, and give help to the foreign powers attacking the frontiers of France. But what I want to say is that if exceptional republican tribunals had been instituted all over France, and firmly supported by the Convention, a good many French lives would have been spared. The equivocal Girond-

ists weakened the Convention, and the Commune of Paris had to take the reins and go ahead."

"It means," said the young man, "that the *canaille* dared to rule gentlemen."

"Well, I have lived," said I, "in the midst of the *canaille*, as you call it, as well as in high society, and ruffians, scoundrels, and hoodlums were not all on one side."

"Please," said the young woman, "go on with the great relief the Terror brought to you."

"Governing by terror," I said, "was not, in the present case, the invention of fiends with human faces; it was evolved by the events themselves. These events were: first, the collapse of the absolute monarchy, due to rank incapacity and bankruptcy; second, the revolt of the long-suffering masses and the ensuing disorders in the streets of Paris, an unprecedented anarchy; third, the opportunity given to, and eagerly seized upon, by the mob to take revenge upon everyone they believed responsible for their abject distress, the recurrent famine, their hopeless poverty, and all the wrongs and evils they had sustained; finally, the inability of the police to control the populace and the slowness of the courts to prosecute and sentence the enemies of the Revolution. The people, knowing that the foreign powers were attacking their country with repeated successes, thought that they were betrayed. Both the government and the governed fell into a panic. The masses took justice into their own hands and made short shift of it. The reactionaries and all the chameleons of the *bon ton* have raised an indignant outcry over the massacres of the imprisoned suspects in September, '92. If a representative government is shot through with lukewarm, vacillating, insincere, depraved, and corrupt deputies, and depends for public order upon an armed force recruited from the very layers of the population it is supposed to restrain, what can you expect at the moment when this population will be crazed by all sorts of fear and suspicion? The question is: Who was actually responsible for the



September atrocities? The populace, whose exasperation led to the slaughtering, or the friends, accomplices, supporters, and confederates of the victims, whose intrigues and machinations infuriated the populace? I think this deserves careful and fair consideration."

"This wholesale murder," exclaimed the woman, "is an indelible blot on that page of the Revolution."

"In this respect," said the nobleman, "we had better keep silent. What about Bartholomew Day, the Dragonnade, and scores of massacres coldly ordered by authorities that had not the excuse of ignorant people's panicky fear, or maddening suspicion? But for the Revolutionary Tribunal there is no excuse whatever."

"We shall see," said I. "The government, mind you, was disarmed in front of the populace and the populace was impatient. They clamored for expiatory victims, for they were persuaded the suspects were the cause of all the ills besetting the country. The only thing for the government to do, then, was to canalize the roaring torrent of the popular wrath; to do, with at least a pretense of legal form, what was done wantonly, violently, and blindly. The Terror was most wrongly called a system. It was an expedient and a temporary one at that. It was a *pis aller*, the last resort. Open and hidden enemies were everywhere. There was no time to lose. The patriots, in order to save the Revolution and the nation for the Revolution, had to strike quickly and hard. So the summary trial and speedy execution of the suspects was regarded less as a deserved punishment than as a warding off of a terrible, immediate, and stealthy danger. The annihilation of this danger overshadowed everything else. An important difference must be made between the parts of France where the royalists, with the help of the bourgeois (who wished to pocket the Revolution for their own advantage), were numerous enough to fight in the open, and between the provinces where they were less venturesome and bellicose. For instance, in Normandy there were

only a few dismissals and arrests; during the whole duration of the Terror, there was not a single sentence of death in the department of Calvados. In Lyons, where many Montagnards had been imprisoned and executed, the reprisals were very harsh, and increased in savagery under Collot and Fouché. In the west, the civil war was inconceivably atrocious and the repression defies description. On the contrary, in central France, the guillotine appeared very seldom. We understand the necessity of the Terror when we see the royalists of Toulon giving over their city to the English. And we have some ground to question the sincerity of their wrathful indignation at the vileness of the Terror if we remember their threats against the Revolutionists and how they acted in '94 and in 1815, the White Terror. I remember in particular what Lombard, the secretary of the Prussian king, said of the *émigrés*' revengeful feelings in July, '92: 'If we deliver their own countrymen to their wrath, France will soon be a gruesome churchyard.' "

"Granted," said my interlocutor, "but all the same you will not tell me that the royalists were the only adversaries of the Revolution. Have you not mentioned the bourgeois?"

"I come to them," said I. "The suspects were of two sorts, the political suspects and the economic suspects. To the first group belonged men and women who opposed liberty, equality, and justice for all. Most of them, for fear of having their property confiscated, had not left the country, as the *émigrés* had done. After the death of the King and the Queen, they did their best to encourage in their wavering the deputies and officials who for some reason or another were not sincere patriots. The Girondists, for example, were accessible to inducements from the right. They stood for the provincial, middle-class conservatives. Some kept in touch with agents of foreign powers hostile to the Revolution. Others received actual help and money from them to engineer all kinds of obstructions—to bribe, buy outright, or demoralize representatives, officials,

and clerks. None was too high or too low to be secure against their wiles of corruption. In fact, unreconcilable enemies of the Revolution held important positions in the revolutionary government.

"The suspects that undermined the economy of France were perhaps more dangerous and certainly more despicable. They did their utmost to delay the financial recovery, to paralyze all efforts toward improving the lot of the masses, to put an end to the causes of discontent. The English statesman, Pitt, spent in France a large part, if not all, of the five million sterling granted him for secret expenses. With a fund of 120 million in assignats, Pitt lowered the rate of exchange and with the connivance of members of the French administration, he was able to discredit the currency. A spy, in the pay of England, had lost his papers. They were found and revealed that he had taught his French correspondents the preparation of phosphoric wicks to explode powder magazines and set fire to naval and military stores and stocks of fodder. In fact, fires of unknown origin had caused important damage in several towns to army establishments, barracks, docks, artillery parks. These papers also gave instruction how to cause a rise in prices of all foodstuffs and to monopolize and corner goods of first necessity, such as tallow and candles.

"The French government defended itself by expelling all foreigners, save Americans and Swiss, and by imposing heavy fines upon the French citizens who should invest with English banks. Until then, the Revolution had been most hospitable to foreigners. Many had come to reside in France. A number of them had been given employment in the government offices. The Prussian Anarcharsis Cloots, self-styled 'the Spokesman for Mankind,' the German Dentzel, and the Anglo-American Thomas Payne, occupied seats in the Convention. Among these numerous refugees there were spies who posed as martyrs of liberty. Foreign bankers and speculators, wolves in good shepherd's attire, played considerable parts in the political and

economic life of the nation. The extremist Hébert and his partisans were not shy of this sort of backing. But the Committee of Public Safety began to take notice of the activities of a good many of these foreigners, who had gone so far as to form so called 'popular societies.' These societies multiplied rapidly all over France and formed a federation having a central committee at its head that controlled the whole affair. This organization, soon powerful, began to compete with the sections, the clubs of the Jacobins—nay, with the Convention itself. In the autumn of '93, this central committee sent around a petition calling upon the Convention to consider the suppression of the priests' salaries and the constitutional cult. Now, civic celebrations had been instituted with the inauguration of the republican calendar, but they had not replaced the Catholic religious celebrations. Catholic worship was still going strong. The petition's real objective was to deal a mortal blow to what they called 'sacerdotal despotism.' The Committee of Public Safety frowned upon the petition. It had the greatest difficulty to maintain public order. It feared a measure pregnant with serious possibilities, perhaps a civil war, all due to the scheme of irresponsible foreigners. Fortunately Robespierre, with his well-known astuteness, smelled a rat. He gave Cloutz a piece of his mind and Anarcharsis kept still. I have told you this story to make you realize how many sly enemies the revolutionary government had to cope with in '93.

"Now, a word about the composition of the Revolutionary Tribunal. If we are to believe the fine ladies and gentlemen that conspired against their own country—to save it, as they claimed, from *sans-culottes* rule, but in truth for their own benefit and advancement—the Revolutionary Tribunals were in the hands of a perverse, bloodthirsty, and drunken rabble. I have known personally a number of them and I can assure you they were not obscene monsters. Let us glance at the judges and the jury that were proposed by the Committee of Public Safety and the Committee of General Security jointly. We see that for the

most part they belong to the bourgeoisie and liberal professions. We find two former priests, five painters and engravers, a banker, three physicians and surgeons, a tradesman, an industrialist, a goldsmith, a jeweller, three tailors, a locksmith, a shoemaker, a printer, a hatter, a grocer, a vinegar merchant. If we read also the name of a modest office-holder, we read on the other hand the names of two authenticated noblemen, Marquis Antonelle and Marquis Leroy de Montflabert. Moreover, each and all of these men, at that time, had a sense of dignity and responsibility, a conception of duty toward their fellow-men and the state a bit superior to what their counterparts have today after the corruption and the leveling process of the Directory and the Empire."

"If these judges and jurymen were so reliable," said the nobleman, "how is it that the accused were deprived of lawyers and witnesses?"

"If the accused," I said, "had not this help, it was not for the reason you suppose. Lawyers' pleas and witnesses' testimonies would have introduced into court political discussions that increased the very danger the Tribunal was instituted to destroy. In addition a defender would not have been an unmixed blessing. With all due respect to respectable lawyers, consider, pray, that in the breaking up of the social order, a living was hard to make and the most honorable man, when at bay, may resort to desperate means to survive. On the other hand, a human being whose head is not secure on his shoulders is ready to spend a fortune to keep it safe in its place. A dialogue, then, takes place between the 'haves' and the 'have nots.' You guess the outcome. Another aspect of the problem is this: honest lawyers would have been slow to accept cases they had so few chances to win, and the meanest shyster could easily exact exorbitant fees. As to witnesses, there would have been a-plenty in the market place. In short, blackmail would have been another name for defense. Only the rich could have afforded that luxury. But the decisive argument is that de-

fense would have consumed time. Now, remember, the people crazed by fear were clamoring at the Tribunals' doors. The Convention, on its side, fearing a discontent that would increase the rival power of the large cities, communes, and the Jacobin clubs had no time to lose. Time, time was the main consideration. In the rush, the fall of a few innocent heads counted little compared with the lives of millions of Frenchmen endangered by intrigues, treacheries, and treasons. The slightest indiscretion or participation in a hostile movement against the Revolution was enough to incriminate you, and this meant elimination by banishment—if feasible—or by a more practical and swifter means, death. There is no place for wishful thinking in a matter that has been so much misrepresented by prejudices and political passions. We hear so much of the number of persons sentenced to death that we infer that every person appearing at the bar was dispatched to the scaffold. Such was not the fact. In Paris, despite the fierce indictments of Fouquier-Tinville—a machine-like man to kill as Abbé Terray was a machine-like man to tax—the number of suspects acquitted compares favorably with the number of suspects who paid with their lives. If you insist on shouting that innocent lambs perished, admit, please, that black sheep escaped."

"I am curious to know," said the woman, "how you will explain the sort of furious rage that seemed to possess the Tribunal at certain moments?"

"Keep in mind, mademoiselle," I answered, "that the Tribunal was but the instrument of the Terror. When the outward or inward danger loomed larger, the Terror increased in intensity. It reflected closely the state of emotion of the masses. The Terror was born of danger, danger controlled the Terror. For instance, Jean-Paul Marat's assassination was a decisive factor for final recourse to the Terror. In the fanatic, fever-exalted physician, the populace was convinced it had an uncompromising and fearless champion. Charlotte Corday's

Girondist knife was a more terrible weapon than she ever dreamed of. Marat was not its only victim. At the same time it pierced Marat's breast, it killed hope in the hearts of thousands and thereafter chopped off scores of friendly heads in consequence."

"Your Revolutionists," exclaimed the young man, "are a fine bunch. Think of '*la douce France*,' the motherland of Joan of Arc, of Saint-Louis, of Sully, and Colbert, being governed by that three-headed Cerberus Danton, Marat, and Robespierre!"

"Sir," I retorted, "this kind of talk may do in one of these drawing-rooms where '*la douceur de vivre*' has again found a shrine and devotees. Between honest men, allow me to say, it makes no sense. Pascal, a Catholic thinker you profess to admire, would take you to task for arguing with words you have failed to define. And, contrary to what you desire to imply, let me tell you that Joan of Arc's shade would have felt more at home with Robespierre than with devout Mme de Maintenon."

"Oh, sir! I beg you, don't be sacrilegious!" exclaimed the young woman.

"I should be sacrilegious, mademoiselle," I said, "if Robespierre had been the monster his many and various enemies have succeeded altogether too well in making him. I could back my statements with arguments that would astound you, but this would take us too far into the night. For my present contention it will suffice to state Robespierre's conception of the revolutionary government."

"I can do it myself," exclaimed the nobleman, "in one word, the 'guillotine.'"

"Listen," said I. "The revolutionary government was an exceptional regime, the purpose of which was to save the Republic. Armed with an immense power, this regime must be prevented from misusing it. How? In exacting from those who wielded it complete abnegation. The day when this dictator-

ship should fall into perfidious and impure hands, liberty would be lost. Against the misuse of dictatorship, there is only one moral guarantee, the virtue of the dictators. In order to fulfil its sublime mission, the revolutionary government then must rest upon both terror and virtue—virtue without which terror is disastrous, terror without which virtue is impotent. Notice, pray, this vital condition of the republican form of government, 'virtue,' so clearly discerned by Montesquieu and Rousseau, both civic and moral virtue."

"Bless me!" exclaimed the gentleman. "This is very edifying, but with virtue as a touchstone I don't recognize the revolutionary government."

"Robespierre did not either," I said. "What follows will explain his policy. 'Social protection,' said Robespierre, 'is due only to peaceful citizens. In a republic, since the power comes from the people, the republicans only are citizens. The royalists, the conspirators are but foreigners—nay, they are enemies. Is not the terrible war that liberty is waging against tyranny indivisible? Are not the enemies inside the country the allies of the enemies outside? The murderers that tear the country at home, the intrigants that buy the conscience of the representatives of the people, the traitors who sell theirs, the libelers paid to dishonor the cause of the people, to destroy public morals by the insidious counter-revolution, are all these people less guilty or less dangerous than the foreign tyrants they serve? All those who interpose parricidal gentleness between these scoundrels and the avenging axe of national justice are like those who would throw themselves between the underlings of the tyrants and the bayonets of our soldiers; all the outbursts of their false sensibility seemed to me but longing sighs toward England and Austria.' The 'Indulgents' should have taken heed of the warning. Instead, they continued their underhanded dealings and at the same time made an effort to form a coalition with the Hébertists against the Committee of Public Safety. Robespierre, who on several occasions had defended



Danton and Camille Desmoulins, both in the club of the Jacobins and in the committees, resigned himself to let the revolutionary justice follow its course. The military campaign was to begin in the spring. The rear had to be cleared of all plots. At the beginning of the spring, Robespierre accused the 'Indulgents' of being the accomplices of the foreign enemies. 'The mass of the people,' he said, 'is in their eyes but the dumb animals destined, they believe, to pull their wagons and carry them to wealth and honors.' The cheats who had intelligence with the enemy were dispatched to the scaffold. Those who blame Robespierre for the double execution of the 'Indulgents' and the 'Extremists' should first know that it was not his personal work, but the task of the government committees. He opposed vigorously any policy of weakness and succeeded in obtaining the death penalty decreed against 'anyone who should propose to negotiate or to make treaties with enemy powers that should not have beforehand acknowledged the independence of the French nation, its sovereignty and the indivisibility and unity of the Republic founded on liberty and equality.' Robespierre had no mercy for the criminal leaders but he always recommended sparing the accessories. As I had, on several occasions, the privilege to work for him and the honor to enjoy his confidence, I have seen many letters in which his bitter adversaries expressed to him their gratitude for his generosity. Robespierre was idolized by the common people. They trusted him implicitly. His earnestness, his austerity, his simplicity, his integrity have earned him the nickname 'The Incorruptible.' This well-deserved reputation was too much for the great majority of the revolutionists. Like the Athenian Aristides, his noble character was the cause of his downfall. The *pourris* ('rotten')—the name given them by the handful of sincere patriots—were tired of 'The Incorruptible.' That very word implied their rottenness. To understand his colleagues' animosity and hatred, one must keep in mind certain facts that are part and parcel of the Revolution. Men who, during the

Old Regime, had had no chance whatever to satisfy their ambitions and passions, were suddenly thrown into the arena. There it was a battle royal, and very few there were who victorious still kept the public good in mind.

"The Revolution, they thought, gives a chance to everybody for personal advancement. All struggled to get good jobs, all desired as soon as possible to be in clover. They looked right and left, left and right for opportunities to make money for themselves, their families, and friends. Corruption, that plague of parliaments in countries where political life is not firmly rooted in traditional self-respect, was the bane of the French Revolution. The more we know about this formidable outbreak, the more we are confirmed in this verdict. It should be a forgone conclusion. Corruption had been one of the determining causes of the downfall of the Bourbons. Then, however, it paraded in its silks and jewels, but now it was stripped of its finery and revealed in all its naked ugliness. The old political edifice had crumbled to dust, but the termites had not been crushed by its fall. They were already in the new structure, at work as usual. Men change their ideas more easily than their habits, and some habits, you know, cling like Death's embrace. 'Out you go, I want your place. It's only fair I had my turn.' The nobility, in a moment of admirable republican fervor, had given up their privileges, some of them later to regret their fit of generosity, others willing to let the shadow go provided the substance remained. Birth did not count any longer, money would. For the politicians, a man of Robespierre's character was a vicious watchdog. They accused him of being a tyrant, knowing full well they were quibbling about the name. A tyrant needs a strongly organized police at his command, but Robespierre's power was due solely to the confidence inspired in the masses by his integrity.

"I have not the time tonight," I said to my obliging listeners, "to unroll for your information the long scroll of the prominent revolutionists who had the best of reasons to fear

the indignation and resentment of Maximilien Robespierre. These men knew or felt that he was well informed about the sources of some of their income as well as the passions that enslaved them. They had been deprived for so long! Now, the time had come to enjoy without restraint the gains they had made from their activities in public life. They were tired, the strife had been ceaseless, and they longed for a well-deserved rest in ease, comfort, and luxury. They were weary of the comedy of demagoguery, it had been such a long pull. Some of the *sansculottes* began to loathe their long pants, they were convinced their plebeian calves were just as shapely as the average calves of many a *ci-devant*. They sighed for drawing-rooms, cheerful company, gay suppers, and good-looking, elegant women. They had seen enough of the *tricoteuses* in the Convention tribunes. You know the rest. The Directory with its licentiousness and lewdness was the perfect realization of their long-repressed dream. Do you want me to mention a few names: Talleyrand, Tallien, Barras, Fouché? . . . That will do. Pardon the tears in my eyes."

"Viscount Barras," exclaimed the young gentleman, "regicide Barras, member of the Directory Barras, and *merveilleuse* Tallien's brazen paramour Barras," and he laughed with a sneer.

"Well, what about Viscount Barras?" said the young woman.

"My father," he said, "was a friend of Lazare Carnot, also a member of the Directory, and Carnot told my father he was sure he had had the distinction of being the most vulgarly insulted mortal that ever was and that he owed it to Viscount Barras, a member of one of the most noble families of France."

"Oh, speak, tell us," cried the young lady.

"I will, my dear, if you cover your face and shut your ears," and he went on: "Once, that rake of a Barras was so crazy mad at quiet and dignified Carnot that he shouted to him: 'There is not a louse on your vile body that is not entitled to spit in your face!'"

"That's the kind of language one speaks," she said disgustedly, "when one loses caste."

"Don't believe it, my dear, you have an exalted but quite wrong idea of noblemen's speech and manners. Punctiliously dressed and good-mannered Maximilien Robespierre never spoke like that, I dare say."

"You are right," I said, "he was too much of a gentleman for that. But, *revenons à nos moutons*, or, if you prefer, to our goats. Let me quote in turn another glaring exponent of the good life, a scion of a still older and more noble family, M. de Talleyrand: 'Whoever has not lived,' said the die-hard sybarite, 'before 1789 has no idea of the suavity of living, *la douceur de vivre*.'

"In my youth, I have known that suavity exactly as M. de Talleyrand understands it. He is one of those men to whom *la douceur de vivre* sticks like gold to King Midas' fingers. It follows him in princely fashion wherever he goes and whatever is the form of government. This was not Robespierre's idea of life, and he paid with his head for his idea of a republican life. Napoleon, who had known him and had appreciated his unflagging interest in the cause of the common people, made this remark at St. Helena: 'Robespierre has been the scapegoat of the Revolution,' and Cambacérès, a former member of the Convention, who became thereafter archchancellor of the Emperor, said to him once: 'Robespierre's is a case on which history has passed judgment but that has never been argued.' Some day, Robespierre's case will be argued. The papers I shall leave to the National Archives will help to take care of that. Everybody will have his due and justice will be done. One word more. Robespierre has been accused by his detractors of being the evil genius of the Terror. How is it, then, that after he himself had fallen a victim to the Terror, the Terror continued for several months worse than ever?"

The young nobleman and his fiancée had listened to me during the last minutes with great attention. Then he said positively: "The Revolution died with Robespierre."

"So I am afraid," said I.

The young woman shook her head as if to dismiss unpleasant thoughts. Then she opened her fan with a coquettish turn of her hand, looked at her musing fiancé, and said with a smile: "However, Prince Talleyrand's, Viscount Barras', and M. Fouché's *douceur de vivre*, thank God, has survived!"

There was a silence. I could not help breaking it. "Yes," I said, "it *has* survived, ill weeds grow apace."

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